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WITCHES

THE TRUTH BEHIND THE LEGENDS & LORE

WITCHES

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THE TRUTH BEHIND THE LEGENDS & LORE

WITCHES

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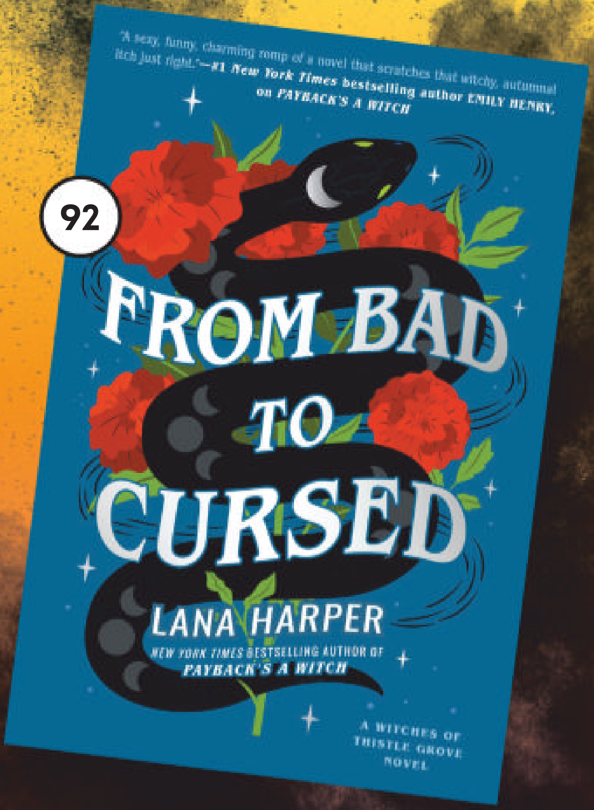

"A sexy, funny, charming romp of a novel that scratches that witchy, autumnal itch just right."—#1 New York Times bestselling author EMILY HENRY, on PAYBACK'S A WITCH
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HOP ON THE BROOM

With everything going on today, the world could sure use a few good witches.

We are the granddaughters of the witches you couldn't burn.”

A slight variation on a passage from Tish Thawer's 2015 novel *The Witches of BlackBrook*, that phrase has become commonplace on signs and T-shirts at women's and civil-rights rallies around the country. The message suggests that bands of brave women (and their allies) have been speaking up and disrupting oppressive, patriarchal systems—often at the expense of their own lives—and will continue to shake things up despite the inherent dangers.

That feels particularly important right now, given the state of the world: Natural disasters are on the rise due to global climate change. Meanwhile, discrimination against LGBTQ+ people and others who live outside rigid societal boundaries is increasing. Then there are the restrictions on reproductive freedom that have resulted from last summer's Supreme Court ruling in the *Dobbs* case.

“The witch hunts were led in a context of great anxiety about the power of birth control,” says Mona Chollet, author of *In Defense of Witches: The Legacy of the Witch Hunts and Why Women Are Still on Trial*. “Midwives were targeted because they could also help women to end a pregnancy.” Yep, these battles of old are new again, and it sure seems like we could use a few more magick-minded folks.

In this issue, we'll explore the early history of the witch, plus the Burning Times and how they're still impacting the world today. We'll talk to some activists whose craft-y identity is intrinsically linked to their work. We'll introduce you to the path of green witchcraft, built around a much needed love of Mother Earth, plus author Deborah Blake reveals the 411 on the eight Sabbats that celebrate and honor the year's cycle.

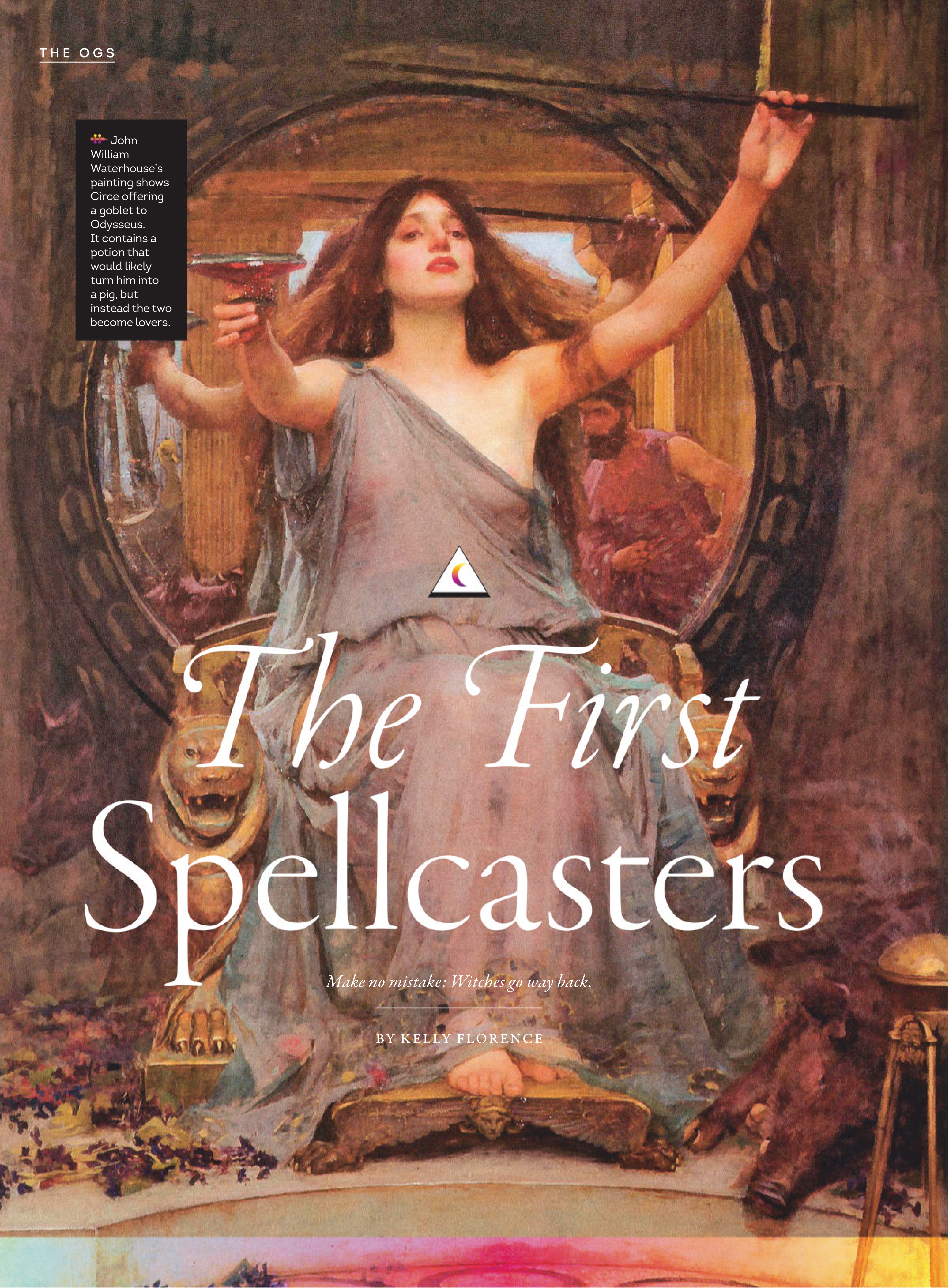
We've also got a primer to help you get your practice up and running, including tips for sacred spaces, spells and tarot reading. And Gabriela Herstik shares how you can tap into your power and shed your shame by using sex magick—with or without a partner. We also talk to bestselling novelist Lana Harper and visit with actresses who have played some of our favorite witches—including *Game of Thrones*' Carice van Houten and *Outlander*'s Lotte Verbeek—to discuss why the archetype is such an enduring and needed one.

There's something in this issue for every witch. Whether you've been practicing for 50 years or you're just magick-curious, there's room on the broom for everyone. Let's fly! —*Shari Goldhagen*

PART 1

AN ENCHANTED HISTORY

DISCOVER THE FIRST SPELLCASTERS, FROM THE SORCERESS OF ENDOR TO MYTHOLOGY'S LEADING LADIES. READ ABOUT THE INFAMOUS WITCH TRIALS AND HOW THEIR IMPACT IS STILL BEING FELT TODAY. FINALLY, MEET SOME FAMOUS FACES OF THE CRAFT, INCLUDING THE VOODOO PRIESTESS WHO HAS CHARMED BOTH THE NFL AND DISNEY.



John William Waterhouse's painting shows Circe offering a goblet to Odysseus. It contains a potion that would likely turn him into a pig, but instead the two become lovers.

The First Spellcasters

Make no mistake: Witches go way back.

BY KELLY FLORENCE

Whether it's Elizabeth Olsen's Wanda Maximoff using chaos magick in the MCU or activists hexing Donald Trump, witches are everywhere these days. But their roots are ancient. So just who were the first witches? And how does their influence live on?

The earliest recorded mention of a witch resides in a law code that punished sorcery, the Babylonian Code of Hammurabi (1792-1750 B.C.). It's the longest, most advanced legal text of its time and states, "If a man charge a man with sorcery, and cannot prove it, he who is charged with sorcery shall go to the river; into the river he shall throw himself, and if the river overcome him, his accuser shall take to himself his house. If the river show that man to be innocent, and he come forth unharmed, he who charged him with sorcery shall be put to death."

This text alludes to an early example of trial by ordeal, which people centuries later would still have to adhere to in order to prove their innocence when accused of witchcraft. It's interesting to note that Hammurabi's Code is very clear in its "an eye for an eye" style of punishment for perceived crime. This mentality has inspired countless revenge plots in witch films including *Black Sunday* (1960), *Carrie* (1976) and *The Craft: Legacy* (2020).

All Greek Myth to Me

The Greeks had no shortage of spellcasters in their myths and religions as well. In the 7th century B.C., Hecate was known as a goddess who presided over magick, spells, ghosts and the underworld. Her body was described as pallid and decaying, so much so, she had to wear a mask when visiting the gods in heaven. Although this description sounds frightening, she was also known as protector of the home and a guardian of borders.

Not all witches in ancient Greece were so revered, though. Aristotle said women would bring disorder and evil to society and were "utterly useless and caused more confusion than the enemy." With attitudes like that, it's not particularly surprising that the most famous witches in Greek mythology, such as Circe and Medea, were depicted as manipulative and predatory, using their feminine wiles and sorcery to ensnare men. This running theme shows how men in power feared unruly, independent women, slapping them with the label "evil," when they react to trauma (though more recently, both characters have been given more nuanced updates).

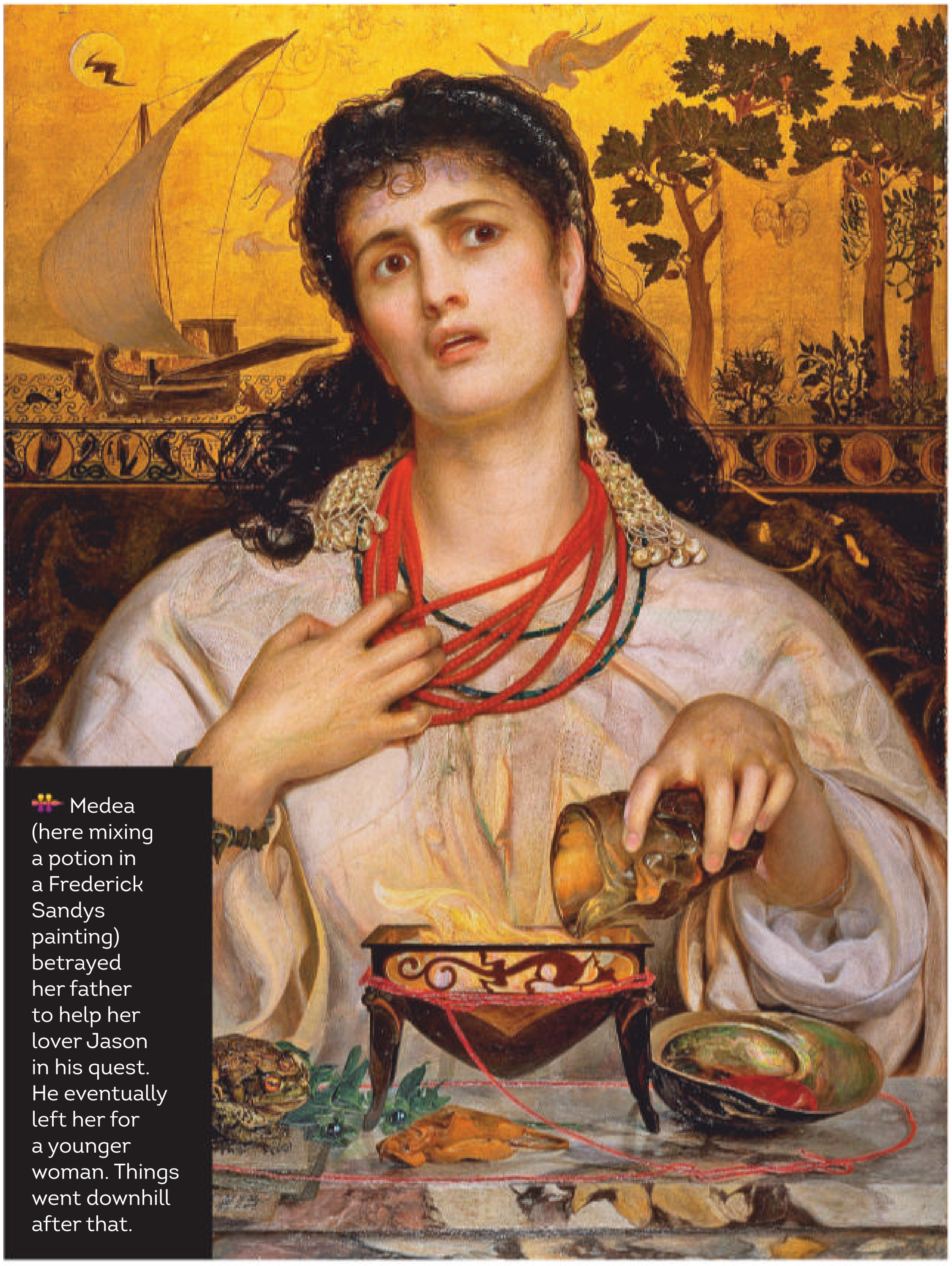
As famed poet Horace wrote in one of his two works about witches, "Canidia, short hair twisted with snakes on her unkempt head, orders fig trees uprooted from graves. She orders funerary Cyprus trees, eggs annointed with the blood of a fowl frog, a feather from a nocturnal owl, herbs, which Iolochos and Hiberia—places ferociously full of poison—sprout forth, and bones snatched from the mouth of a hungry dog. She orders all this to be burned in Colchian flames." Pretty horrific!

"WANDA BECOMES A NEAR-IDENTICAL MATCH TO MEDEA.... THEY EXHIBIT A KIND OF RAGE THAT IS ALMOST ALWAYS DEEMED UNLADYLIKE."

—Collider, comparing the MCU's Scarlet Witch to Medea

Although Canidia may not have been portrayed on screen by name, the image of the terrifying witch who preys on children has been seen time and time again in films such as *The Witches of Eastwick* (1987), *Hocus Pocus* (1993), *Gretel & Hansel* (2020) and *The Witches* (2020).

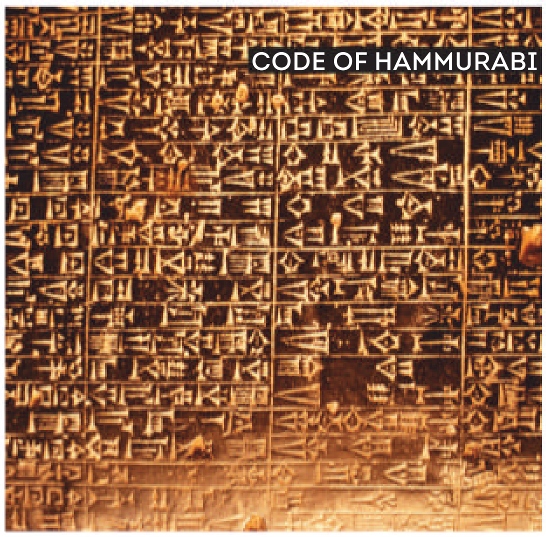
The Hebrew Bible (written around 931-721 B.C.) mentions a witch in 1 Samuel



Medea (here mixing a potion in a Frederick Sandys painting) betrayed her father to help her lover Jason in his quest. He eventually left her for a younger woman. Things went downhill after that.

28:3–25: the Witch of Endor. Like Hecate in Greek mythology, she could summon the spirits of the dead. It was written that she called upon that of the prophet Samuel in order to help Saul defeat the Philistines in battle. The plan backfired, though, because Samuel delivered a prophecy of doom for Saul instead of advice...and it all came true. Still, it wasn't necessarily anti-magick. According to the Feminae: Medieval Women and Gender Index website, "Prior to the sixteenth century, the Witch of Endor was often referred to as a necromancer, sorceress, medium, diviner or phitonissa. These terms did not carry an inherently negative or accusatory connotation. During the period of witch hunting and persecutions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the word 'witch' was popularized in order to inextricably link the sorceress to demon worship, evil and deceit." The Witch of Endor has been portrayed in music, poems, plays and in movies and on TV, including the series *Of Kings and Prophets* (2016).

Then there's Lilith. Jewish legends say it was she, not Eve, whom God first made as a companion for Adam in Eden. But when she was told to be subservient to Adam, she left paradise of her own volition. For years she was depicted as the first demon, murdering babies and stealing semen from men to breed more evil offspring. But of late, she's become a symbol of modern feminism and a deity in some Wiccan sects.


CODE OF HAMMURABI

HECATE

Double, Double...Standards

"You break the rules and become a hero. I do it and I become the enemy. That doesn't seem fair," Wanda, aka the Scarlet Witch, tells Stephen Strange (Benedict Cumberbatch) in the summer 2022 blockbuster *Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness*. Though the film takes place in the present, the double standard for male and female magick users goes centuries back. Thousands of women who exerted their power, knowledge or expertise found themselves battling established institutions.

"Wise Women" were those who used their skills to help others by performing healing, fertility rituals and providing medicines. They created remedies from natural things: plants, animals, minerals and water. Although Wise Women were not often identified as witches because their magick was helpful rather than harmful, they could find themselves under suspicion and charged with witchcraft, especially after men started getting formally trained in medicine between the 14th and 17th centuries. Women who continued to use traditional practices were seen as not following the rules and were thus sanctioned. But the old ways weren't always wrong.

CANIDIA AND SAGANA

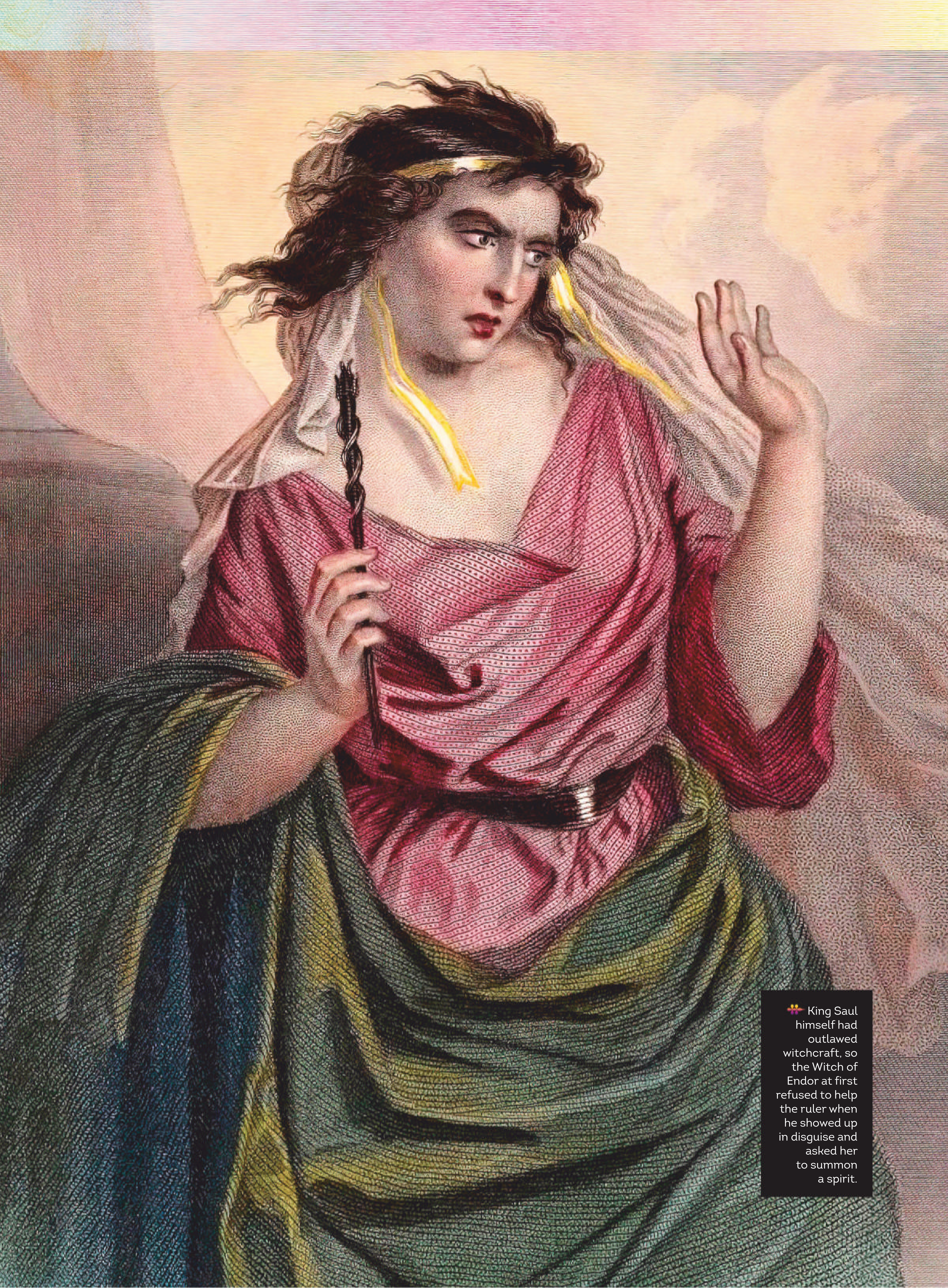
For *The Science of Witchcraft*, a book I wrote with Meg Hafdahl, we talked to Linda Black Elk, an Indigenous ethnobotanist who is teaching people to relearn their traditional plant knowledge for the purpose of healing and food sovereignty. We spoke about the intersection of science and Indigenous knowledge, and she gave the following example: "I worked with a chemist [Gary Stoltzenberg] at North Dakota State University. I told him the Lakota story about when you go out to pick sand cherries, you're supposed to approach them from downwind, otherwise they'll smell you coming and will turn bitter. Through research, he found the sand cherries have these stomata [pores in their leaves and stems] that will in fact take in animal pheromones. If they sense those pheromones, they sense a predator and start producing bitter alkaloids. It can happen very quickly, so you are supposed to approach them from downwind." It was a fascinating interview that made us look at nature with fresh eyes!

"AND I WILL TELL YOU OF ALL THE WICKED WITCHCRAFT THAT CIRCE WILL TRY TO PRACTICE UPON YOU."

The Odyssey

Whether it's asserting our power, communing with the dead or speaking with nature, we need to welcome our abilities and lean into them. The first witches in history undoubtedly walked so we could run. May we embrace the season of the witch!

Kelly Florence is the co-author of multiple books, including The Science of Witchcraft *with Meg Hafdahl. They co-host the Horror Rewind podcast and write and produce horror projects together.*

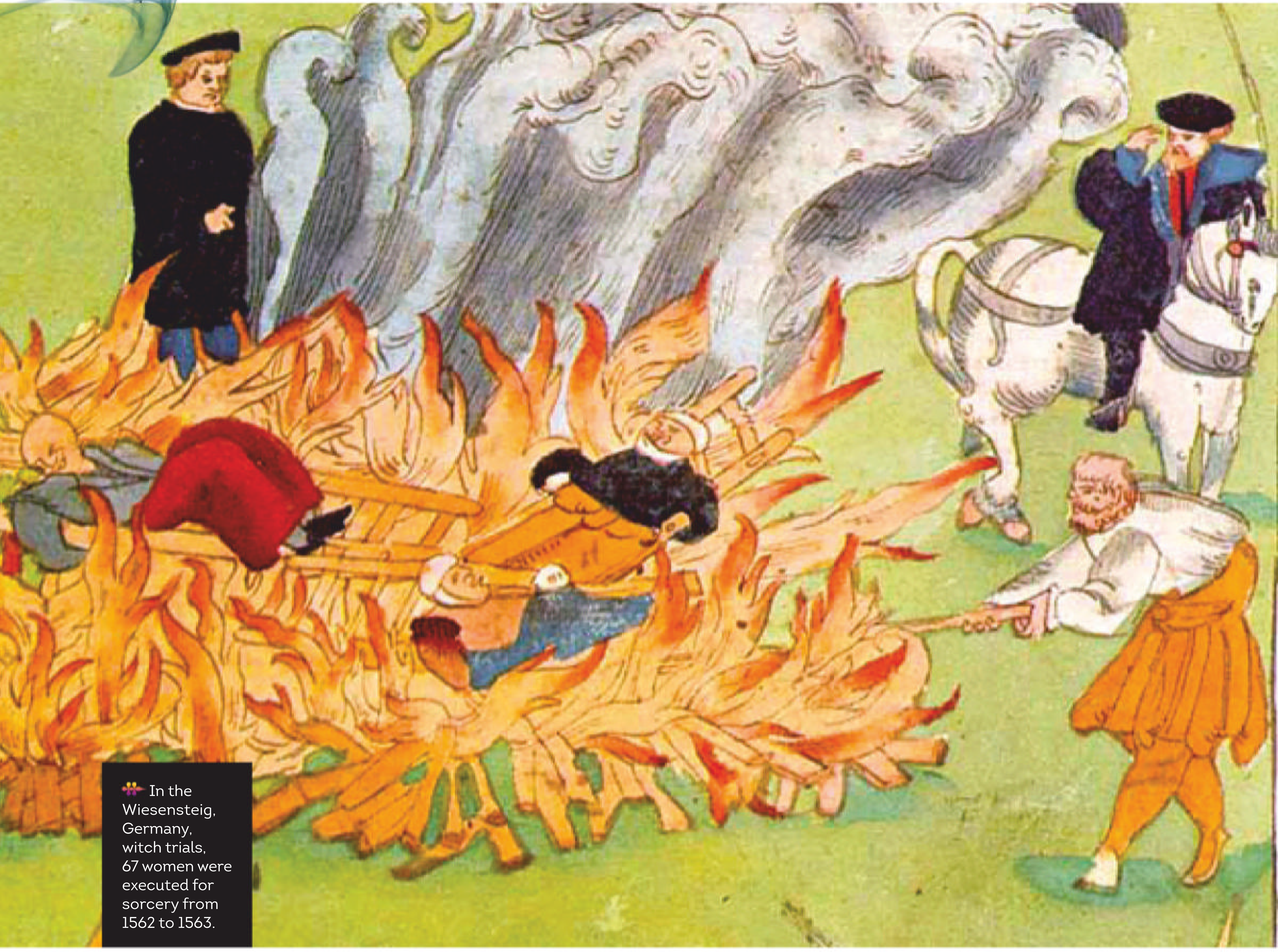


King Saul himself had outlawed witchcraft, so the Witch of Endor at first refused to help the ruler when he showed up in disguise and asked her to summon a spirit.

THE *Burning* Times

It was the supposed Age of Reason, yet tens of thousands of accused witches—almost all of them women—were executed.

BY SHARI GOLDHAGEN



In the Wiesensteig, Germany, witch trials, 67 women were executed for sorcery from 1562 to 1563.

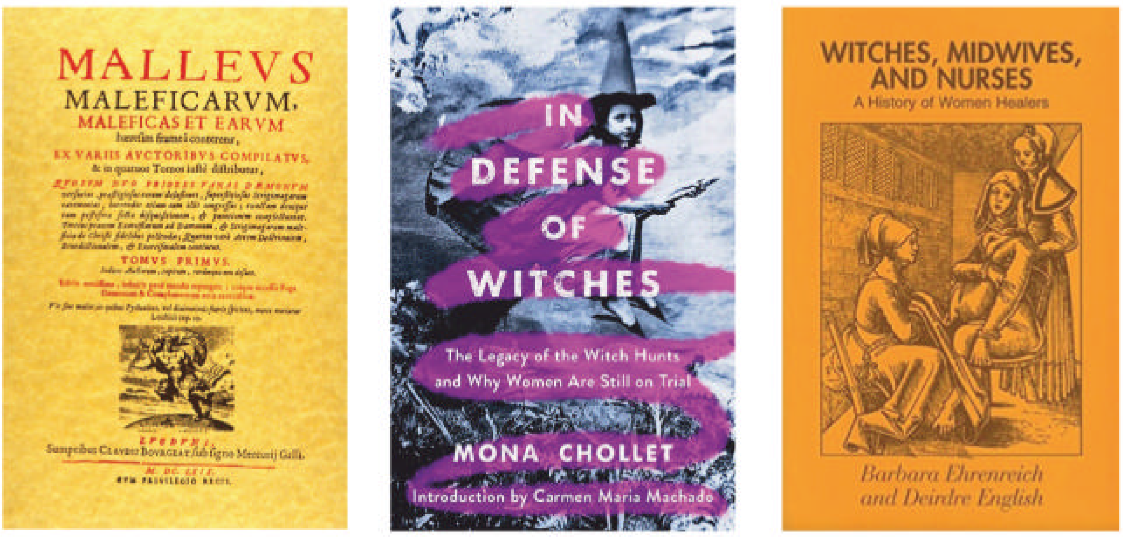
Today it's known as the Burning Times. A period where tens of thousands were accused and executed for witchcraft in Europe and the Americas.

While witch hunts don't get a lot of time in history classes, Hollywood has made plenty of films about them. Alas, if you've seen them, you might think these events transpired during the bleak Middle Ages with all that Black Death and superstition. You'd be wrong.

The trials in Europe coincided with the Renaissance (1400-1600)—a period in which history.com says "some of the greatest thinkers, authors, statesmen, scientists and artists in human history thrived…while global exploration opened up new lands and cultures to European commerce." That was followed by the Age of Enlightenment (1685-1815), when science and reason trumped superstition and people were supposedly, you know, enlightened. And yet, between 1500 and 1800—when Shakespeare, Descartes and Leonardo da Vinci were all doing their thing—an estimated 40,000-80,000 people were investigated and executed for witchcraft in Europe; 85% of them were women.

"At the end of the Middle Ages, women were relatively free and their autonomy, even [though] limited, sparked anger and fear," says Mona Chollet, a Franco-Swiss journalist and author of *In Defense of Witches: The Legacy of the Witch Hunts and Why Women Are Still on Trial*. "We remember the Enlightenment as a time of progress [and] as the triumph of reason, but it was also a very barbaric time, and [by] the end of it, the situation of women in European societies was much worse than at its beginning."

It's true that men were also targets of witchcraft accusations; in some cases, they were even the primary victims—such as the Salzburg, Austria, witch trials that began in 1675 and saw 139 people executed, nearly all of them children or teenage members of a homeless gang of beggars. But more often than not, the men who were accused became targets while defending their wives—such as Salem, Massachusetts' John Proctor (made famous in Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible*), who was hanged.


MALLEVS MALEFICARVM
IN DEFENSE OF WITCHES
The Legacy of the Witch Hunts and Why Women Are Still on Trial
MONA CHOLLET
Introduction by Carmen Maria Machado
WITCHES, MIDWIVES, AND NURSES
A History of Women Healers
Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English

Malleus Maleficarum was a hunting how-to; Mona Chollet's 2022 tome examines the trials' impact; first published in 1973, *Witches, Midwives, and Nurses* is still sadly relevant.

What's more, in many cultures where women were accused, they weren't entitled to the recourse afforded their male counterparts. As Chollet notes, in France, men made up 20% of those accused, but they filed 50% of the appeals. Of course, it probably helped that the governing bodies overseeing every aspect of the proceedings were comprised exclusively of white men.

Church and State…and Hate

It's not that people in the Middle Ages didn't believe in witches. They did, especially in rural farming communities; it wasn't all that unusual for some people to blame a bad harvest or a dead child on a "witch." There are a spattering of accounts of mob justice, such as in 1090, when three Bavarian peasant women were burned to death by neighbors claiming the trio had poisoned people and destroyed crops. But these acts weren't state- or church-sanctioned. During the period, it also wasn't uncommon for townspeople to go to a "Cunning Woman" or "Wise Wife" for a glimpse at the future through her divination tools or an herbal treatment (often trying to start or terminate a pregnancy).

This all changed dramatically in the 15th century, when the Catholic Church—a hugely powerful force at the time—officially recognized witchcraft. Suddenly practitioners of magick (or those accused) were thought to have made a pact to serve Satan and harm Christians in exchange for otherworldly powers.

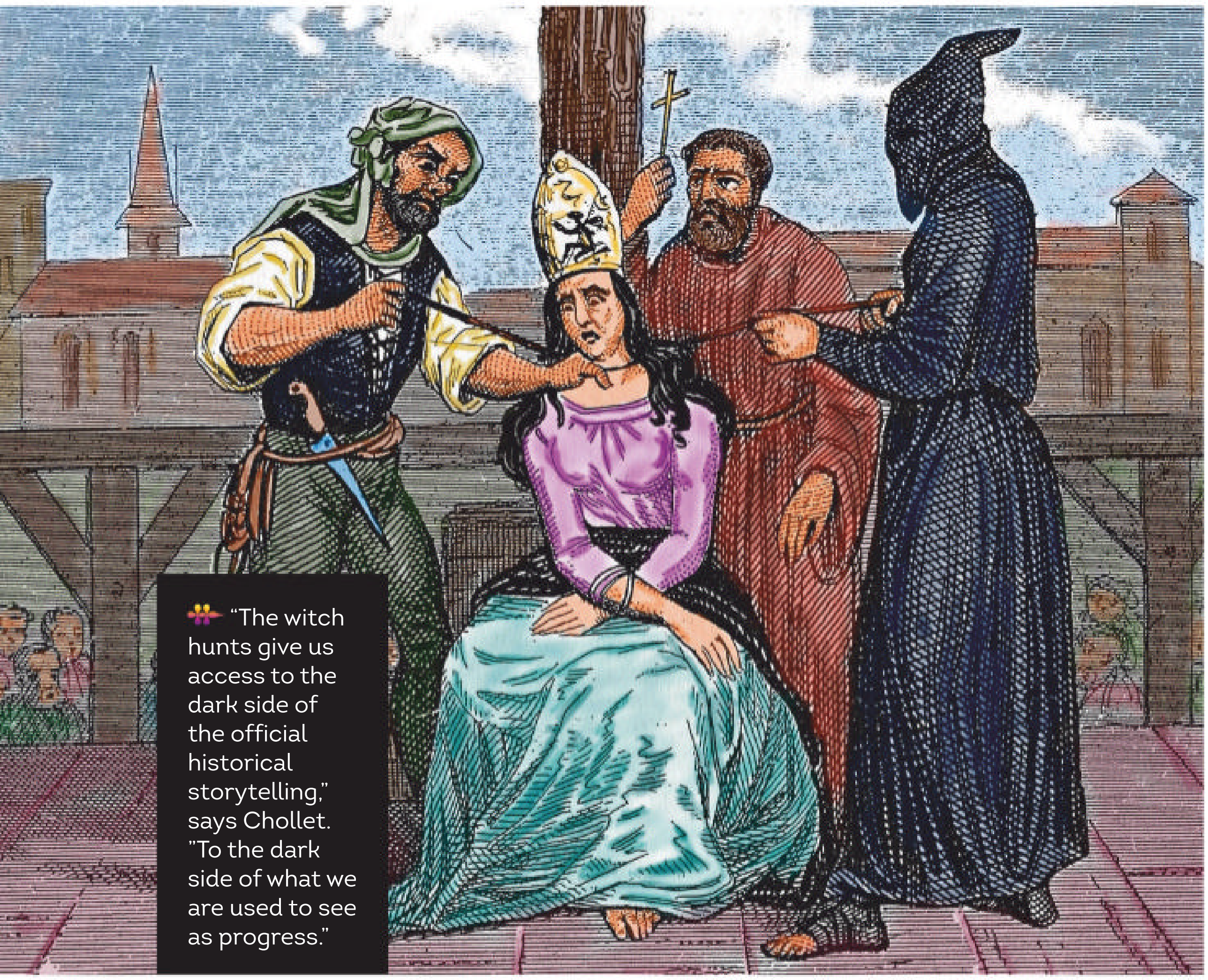
In 1487, German clergyman Heinrich Kramer published *Malleus Maleficarum*, (translation: *The Hammer of Witches*). The book explicitly labeled witchcraft heresy and became the go-to guide for anyone interested in hunting down, interrogating and, of course, punishing witches.

Was it inherently misogynistic? I mean only if you consider lines such as "When a woman thinks alone, she thinks evil," "She is a liar by nature," and "They kill [men] by emptying their purses, consuming their strength, and causing them to forsake God" misogynistic.

While Kramer was an inquisitor, the church was far from the only authority in the hunting game; state officials were often deeply embroiled. Case in point, King James VI Stuart of Scotland (later King James I of England) was an anti-witch zealot who personally questioned accused women and oversaw their torture in Scotland's North Berwick Trials in 1590.

"Most of the trials and executions were led by the civil power, not by the Inquisition," says Chollet. "We tend to picture witch hunters as a handful of crazy, fundamentalist men who abused their power to terrorize entire societies. It's an unconscious way to minimize the importance of the witch hunts and of their legacy. In reality, the belief in witchcraft and its dangers was very well ingrained in societies. In France, for example, Jean Bodin, who is remembered as an influential intellectual and important political thinker, was also the author of a [treatise] that justified and encouraged the witch hunts."

To extract "confessions," investigators used many methods of torture, including



"The witch hunts give us access to the dark side of the official historical storytelling," says Chollet. "To the dark side of what we are used to see as progress."

sleep deprivation and sexual humiliation (always a fave of misogynists). Evidence against the accused could be as simple as having a "witch's mark," i.e., any unsightly blemish (which was often found while being publicly stripped), or failing a swim test by *not* drowning after being bound and thrown into a body of water. If an accused person drowned, they might not be a witch, but they were dead. Oopsies!

What Makes a Witch?

So who was most likely to be accused? Well, being sex positive was definitely a negative. In their book, *Witches, Midwives, and Nurses,* Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English write, "First, witches are accused of every conceivable sexual crime against men. Quite simply, they are 'accused' of female sexuality." Indeed, records from the trials often involve detailed accounts of a woman in all manner of intimate acts with Satan. Kramer himself wrote: "All witchcraft comes from carnal lust, which is in women insatiable."

About that...not liking sex with certain men was also a good way for a gal to find herself on the naughty list. "I read many stories of women who were accused of witchcraft by men who raped them and wanted to protect themselves—or of women who denounced their rapists, and ended up accused themselves," says Chollet.

Bedroom behavior wasn't the only way to find yourself in the shackles. Ehrenreich and English continue: "Second, they are accused of being organized. Third, they are accused of having magickal powers affecting health–of harming, but also of healing. They were often charged specifically with possessing medical and obstetrical skills."

Healers, they say, were targeted because they posed a threat to medical schools emerging in the period (which women weren't allowed to attend) and of course being able to control one's fertility allows a woman to control her destiny. As Kramer wrote: "No one does more harm to the Catholic church than midwives."

"IT WAS MISOGYNY IN ACTION. IT NEEDS TO BE RECOGNIZED AMONG THE GREAT CRIMES OF HISTORY."

Author Mona Chollet

Other victims included those on the outs with the church, old women, widows and women who weren't mothers and thus seen as unnatural. But, it pretty much became a free-for-all.

"The first to be accused were those marginal people," says Phillips Stevens Jr, PhD, a former associate professor of cultural anthropology at the University at Buffalo, in New York. "But as the collective scapegoating spreads, the accusations spread to the mainstream—where people accuse their neighbors and more and more people get swept up. At this point it becomes pathological—a witch hunt is a social movement."

Look to Salem: The first women accused by a trio of young girls (who included the daughter and the niece of town clergyman Rev. Samuel Parris) were Sarah Osborne, a crotchety widow who had a long-standing dispute with the Parrises; Tituba, one of the family's enslaved people from Barbados; and a disabled beggar named Sarah Good. But by the time royal governor William Phips stepped in to stop the trials, more than 200 people had been accused, many of them upstanding members of the community (even Phips' own wife).

Witch hunts in Germany were particularly barbaric, with an estimated 25,000 executions. The hamlet of St. Maximin had only 2,200 residents, but by the mid-1500s, more than 500 people had been executed there. In Bamberg, meanwhile, nearly 1,000 people were tortured and burned in crematoriums (to save firewood) between 1623 and 1631.

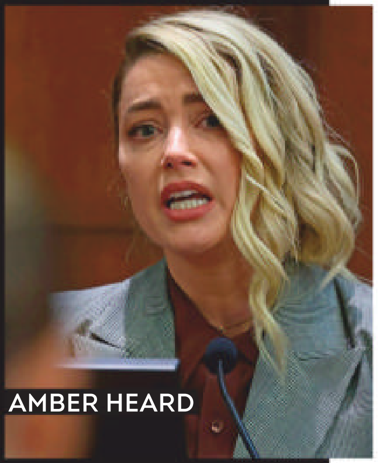
The French-speaking area of Switzerland, however, holds the record for executions per capita, with 3,500. In two villages, only a single woman remained!

Anna Göldi—a poor domestic worker accused of poisoning the family that employed her—was beheaded in Switzerland in 1782; she's generally thought to be the last European executed for the craft.

But lest you think we've come all that far: In June's majority opinion in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*—the decision overturning *Roe v. Wade*—Justice Samuel Alito cited Matthew Hale, a 17th century British judge who executed two women for witchcraft, and didn't believe marital rape was possible.

DANGEROUS WHORES

How far have we actually come since the witch trials? BY EMILIA HART


AMBER HEARD

"As she lied, so she died."

"He could have killed you. He had every right."

These two statements were made hundreds of years apart, and yet they share a chilling resonance.

The first comes from Thomas Potts' record of the 1612 Pendle witch trials in Lancashire, England. The second comes from a TikTok post that went viral during the recent libel suit that Johnny Depp brought against his ex-wife Amber Heard.

You'd be forgiven for thinking things have improved a lot for women in the 410 years between the two cases. But women who challenge the patriarchy still find themselves on trial, just as they did in the 17th century. They are still called "liars," "dangerous," "malicious," and, of course, "whores."

From the 1400s to the 1700s, witch hunts swept through Europe and the New World. Historians disagree on what caused this frenzy, but most of the time the accused was a woman–often, one who acted in ways that those in power (men) did not condone.

We can see this with the Pendle witch trials, which inspired my debut novel, *Weyward*.

In Pendle, the women who were accused were outliers in their communities. Most of the defendants were women who acted as cunning folk in their village.

Today, it's still dangerous to be a woman who stands out. Who speaks out. But instead of the noose or the pyre, we face the loss of our careers. Our privacy. Sometimes, even our safety.

In 2015, Ambra Gutierrez accused film producer Harvey Weinstein of sexual assault. At the time, Gutierrez was labeled by the media as a gold digger and an opportunist. She was faced with so much vitriol that she left the country.

The #MeToo movement–started by Black activist Tarana Burke in 2006 and popularized in 2017–seemed like it would change everything. Following multiple allegations by Gutierrez and others, Weinstein was eventually convicted on numerous assault charges and sentenced to 23 years in prison.

But the backlash was only just beginning.

We saw it with Christine Blasey Ford, who accused Brett Kavanaugh of sexual misconduct following his 2018 nomination to the U.S. Supreme Court. Despite her gut-wrenching testimony, Kavanaugh became a Supreme Court justice–a lifetime appointment with massive ability to influence the country, plus a $200k a year salary and benefits. Ford received death threats.

Four years later, Heard spoke out, too, when she accused ex-husband Depp of abuse. Though a U.K. court found 12 allegations of abuse to have been proved to the civil standard, in June a Virginia jury found in Depp's favor.

It's hard not to wonder what impact the court of public opinion–weaponized by social media–had on the verdict.

Heard won't be the last woman to be put on trial.

In March this year, Marilyn Manson filed a lawsuit against Evan Rachel Wood, who accused him of abusing her during their relationship (which began when she was 18 and he was 36).

TikTokers are already calling it the "sequel" to the Depp-Heard trial.

The witch is in the docks. And the gallery wants blood.

Emilia Hart is a London-based lawyer. Her first novel, Weyward, *out in March 2023, follows a witch trial in the 1600s.*

SPIRITUALISM & *Slime*

How ectoplasm and dated laws led to the last witch trial in the U.K.

BY MEG HAFDAHL

During the height of spiritualism, it was common practice to try to photograph spirits and any traces of their ectoplasm.

When I first came across the mention of ectoplasm in my research for *The Science of Witchcraft*, my mind immediately went to one of my favorite childhood movies, *Ghostbusters* (1984). In the film, it was the slime emitted from the trapped spirits, essentially their undead essence, that the Ghostbusters' sucked into their proton packs. Surely, I can't be the only one who hears the word ectoplasm and immediately pictures Slimer dripping with green ooze.

All fictional fun aside, ectoplasm has a long history that's intertwined with witchcraft. In fact, one can go to Cambridge University in the U.K. and request to see a sample of the supposed substance preserved on a handkerchief. I was able to find photos of this viscous piece of history in the university's digital library. According to the accompanying information, ectoplasm can manifest in different forms, including strings, vapor or the traditional salivalike goo.

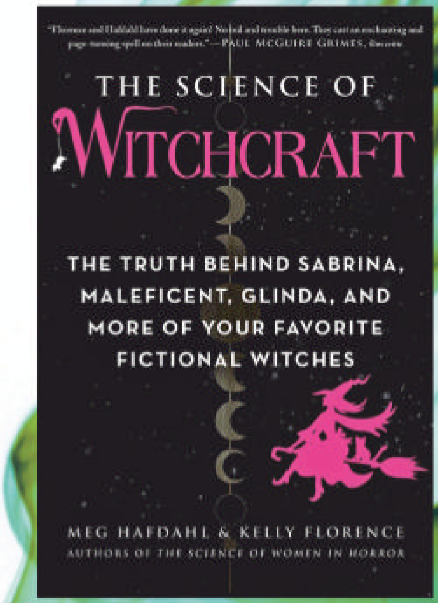
There are two definitions of ectoplasm, one based in science, and the other paranormal. Scientists characterize ectoplasm as the outer layer of cytoplasm in amoeboid cells; in other words, it's basically a protector of a cell, a clear covering that works to safeguard the vital material inside.

Followers of spiritualism have a wholly different definition of the term. Ectoplasm, much as it appeared in *Ghostbusters*, is a substance associated with spirits. It was believed to come from a medium's mouth, nose, even ears, signifying the physical manifestation of those they were escorting from the land of the dead to our domain.

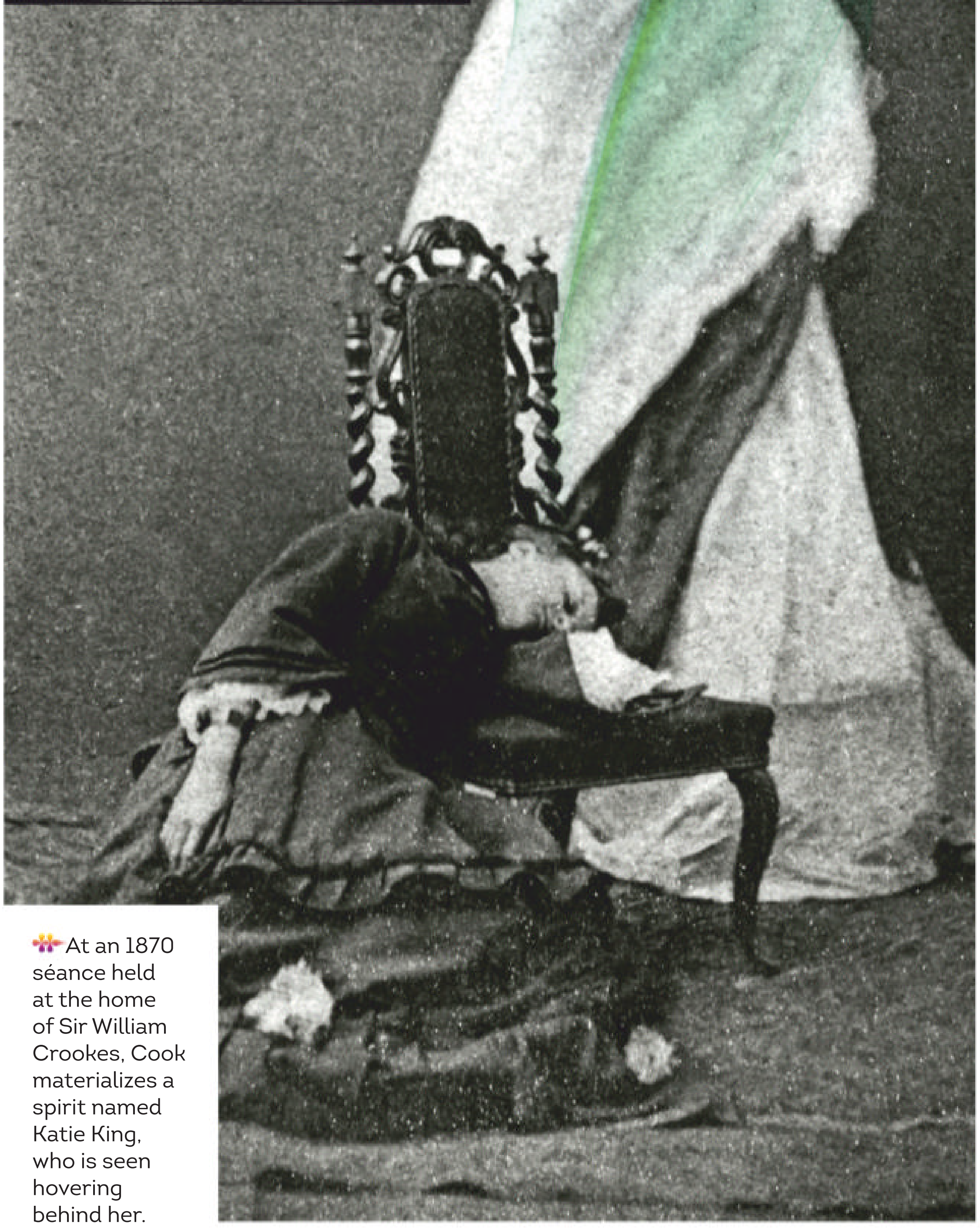
While this belief is no longer common in the modern era, the rise of spiritualism in the 19th century gave way to mediums across the globe practicing their talents in the pursuit of ectoplasm. It was considered ideal for mediums to prove that their emissions were indeed real. One experimental chemist, Sir William Crookes, insisted that séances must be held in the moonlight for ideal ectoplasm display. He even used the light of a phosphorous lamp during a séance in 1870, in which he determined that the medium, Florence Cook, was indeed truthful about bringing forth the emanation of a ghost. While a talented scientist being involved in such a paranormal investigation seems odd, Crookes was a man of great belief in spiritualism, as well as an instrumental scientist in the discovery of the X-ray.

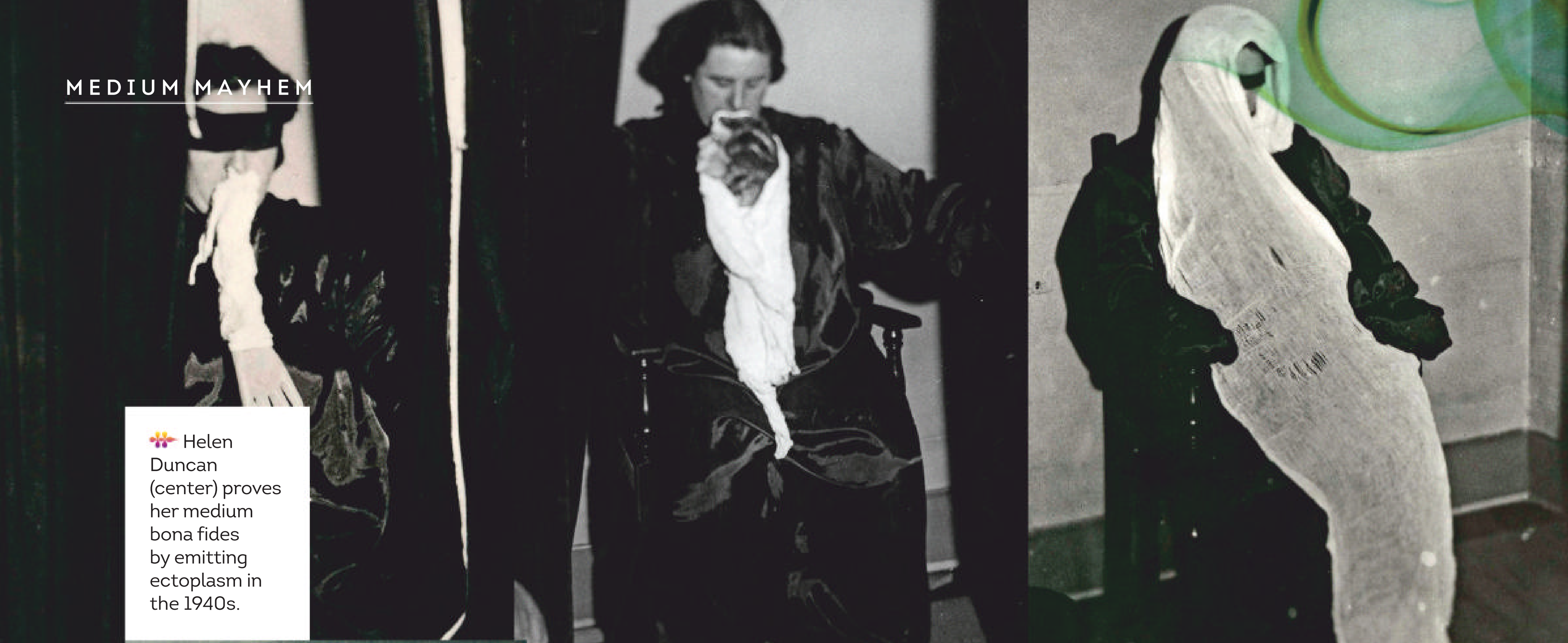
The Last Witch of Scotland

The most noted medium with a penchant for producing ectoplasm was Scotland's


THE SCIENCE OF
WITCHCRAFT
THE TRUTH BEHIND SABRINA, MALEFICENT, GLINDA, AND MORE OF YOUR FAVORITE FICTIONAL WITCHES
MEG HAFDAHL & KELLY FLORENCE
AUTHORS OF THE SCIENCE OF WOMEN IN HORROR

FLORENCE COOK


At an 1870 séance held at the home of Sir William Crookes, Cook materializes a spirit named Katie King, who is seen hovering behind her.



Helen Duncan (center) proves her medium bona fides by emitting ectoplasm in the 1940s.

HELEN DUNCAN

Duncan (hiding her face) and co-defendant Frances Brown (behind) leave a London hearing in 1944 after being charged with conspiracy to contravene the Witchcraft Act 1735.

Helen Duncan. Born at the cusp of the 20th century, Duncan is the last person to be tried in court as a witch in Scotland.

A devout believer in the afterlife, Duncan was known to have a gift for speaking to spirits as a child. As she grew up, so did her ability, which involved a white foam that dribbled from her lips. It was this foam that was believed to be ectoplasm and was considered the link between worlds. It allowed the spirits to come forth and speak to their grieving families.

Duncan traveled around the U.K., offering her services throughout the 1930s and 1940s. In fact, it is she who provided the ectoplasm that's on display at Cambridge University.

While it's nice to think that Duncan was a generous bridge, carrying messages to and from the dead, there is simply no scientific proof she did. Despite her high position in spiritualism (she was a minister of a network of churches), Duncan was denounced by both local newspapers as well as the London Psychic Laboratory. In 1933, Duncan had to pay a fine and spend a month in a Scottish prison for being a "fraudulent medium."

Her most noteworthy clash with the law came in 1944. Duncan had dealt with many skeptics in her time, and because of the threat of fines, she had created a more secretive way to provide her medium services. But while she was living in Portsmouth, England, at the height of World War II, Duncan participated in a séance during which she and fellow attendees claimed to have seen the spirit of a Navy man who had died on a sunken ship, along with 800 other sailors. This particular reading fueled oodles of gossip, as there was indeed such a ship, but it wouldn't be declared lost for several months (the Royal Navy had deliberately delayed the news of the sinking in hopes of keeping enemy forces in the dark).

The public curiosity about the inexplicable event put Duncan on the radar of authorities. While she was in the middle of performing a séance in January

1944, Scottish authorities forced their way into Duncan's home and arrested her.

Today, it's hard to imagine that merely 70 years ago, Duncan was charged with a crime for convening with spirits and producing what she called ectoplasm. But, the Great Britain Witchcraft Act was still in effect at the time of her arrest.

Still on the Books

Like the ups and downs of Duncan's career, the Witchcraft Act, originally drafted by England's Parliament in 1542, had its bumps. The act, which made witchcraft a crime punishable by death, only lasted five years, but was reinstated in 1562 as fears of witchcraft raged throughout Europe during the Burning Times. In 1604, an amendment to the act transferred the responsibility for punishing witches from the church to the state.

The death penalty for witchcraft remained in effect for nearly a century in England; the last known execution was in 1717. Eighteen years later, Parliament abolished the old law, but enacted the Witchcraft Act 1735, which annulled the death penalty, but imposed fines or imprisonment on people who claimed to be able to have magickal powers. It was a touch of twisty wordplay that meant someone didn't necessarily have to be labeled a witch to be punished. Still, the act probably spared hundreds or perhaps even thousands of lives, including many marginalized women.

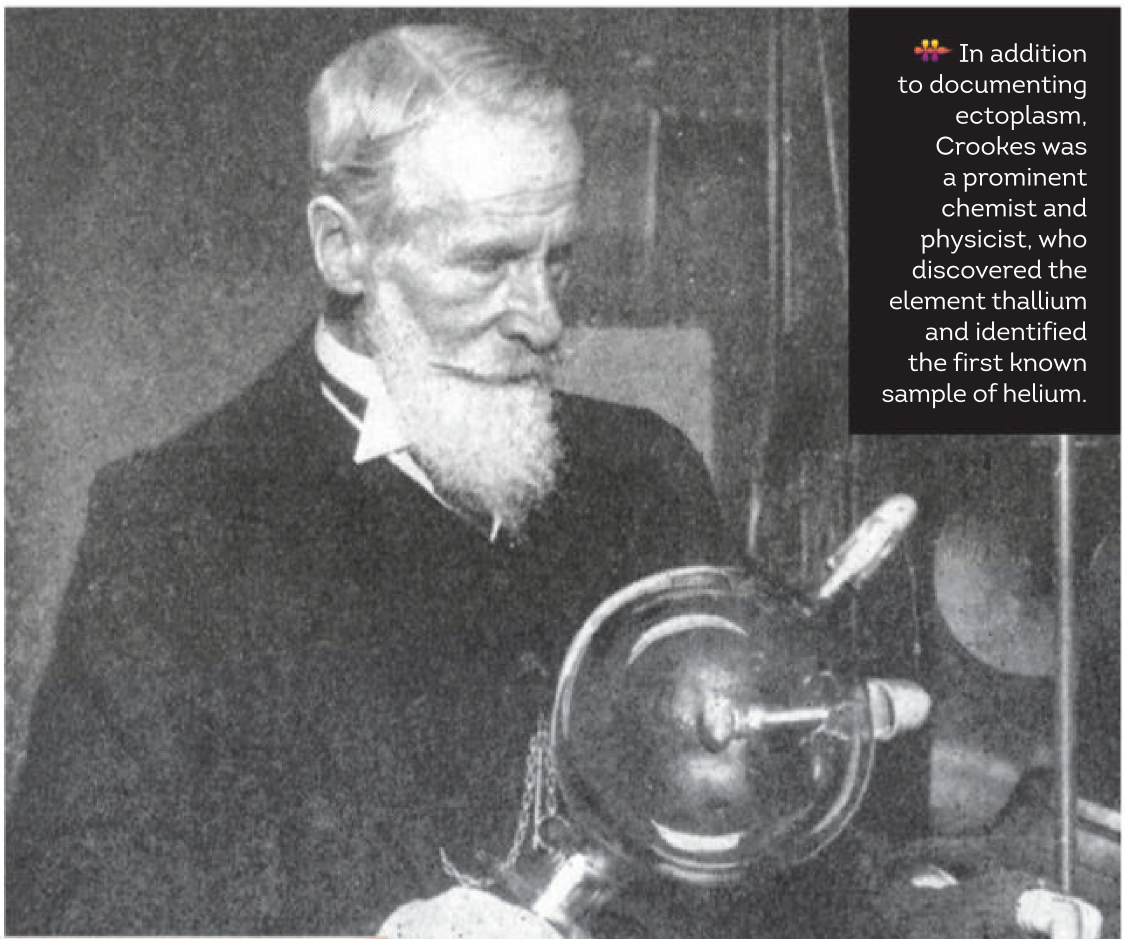
When Duncan was seized by law enforcement in 1944, she was considered the last person charged under the Witchcraft Act 1735. Found guilty, Duncan served nine months in jail. She was later investigated in 1956, though no charges were filed, and she died several months later.

While Duncan is widely known as the "last witch of Scotland," there was someone else in England. Jane Rebecca Yorke, in her 70s at the time of her arrest, was actually charged under the act later in 1944. She was merely fined. But because Duncan had undergone a lengthy trial that was covered by the media, her guilty charge overshadowed Yorke's.

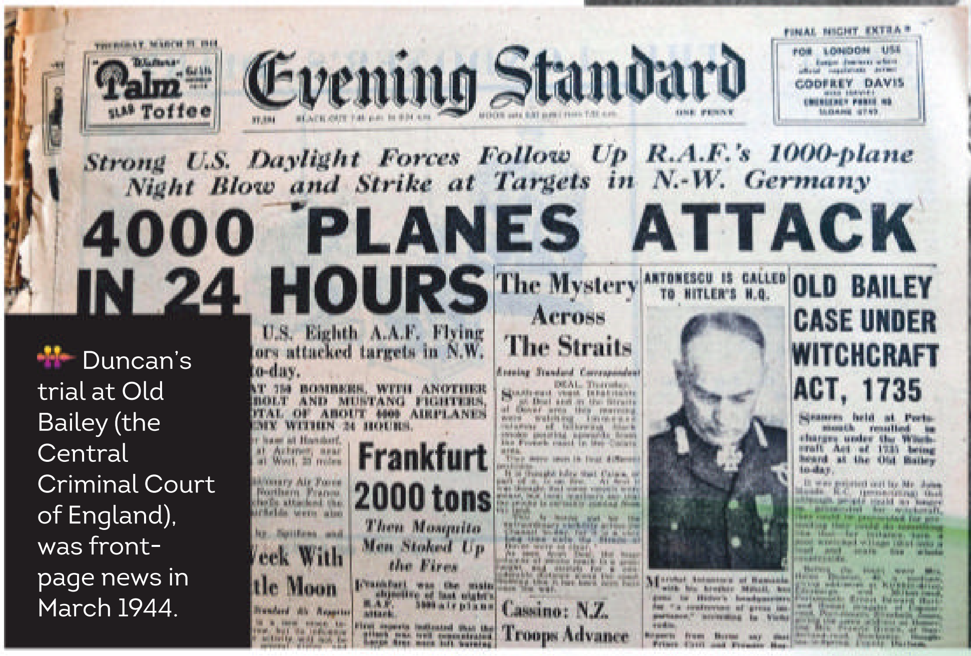
In 1951, the Witchcraft Act was finally repealed. It was immediately replaced with a similar law, the Fraudulent Mediums Act (which was revoked in 2008).

There has never been any scientific proof of the existence of the paranormal definition of ectoplasm, so the likelihood of ending up covered in ghost goo à la *Ghostbusters*, is well…not high. Even so, I'm still intrigued by that handkerchief in the library of Cambridge University. Provided by the "last witch" herself, one has to imagine it holds a certain kind of magick.

Meg Hafdahl is the author of several novels and nonfiction books about the supernatural, including The Science of Witchcraft *(with Kelly Florence).*



In addition to documenting ectoplasm, Crookes was a prominent chemist and physicist, who discovered the element thallium and identified the first known sample of helium.



FINAL NIGHT EXTRA

Palm Toffee

Evening Standard

FOR LONDON USE
GODFREY DAVIS

ONE PENNY

Strong U.S. Daylight Forces Follow Up R.A.F.'s 1000-plane Night Blow and Strike at Targets in N.-W. Germany

4000 PLANES ATTACK IN 24 HOURS

U.S. Eighth A.A.F. Flying …ors attacked targets in N.W. …to-day.

Frankfurt 2000 tons

Then Mosquito Men Stoked Up the Fires

…eek With …tle Moon

The Mystery Across The Straits

Evening Standard Correspondent

Cassino: N.Z. Troops Advance

ANTONESCU IS CALLED TO HITLER'S H.Q.

OLD BAILEY CASE UNDER WITCHCRAFT ACT, 1735

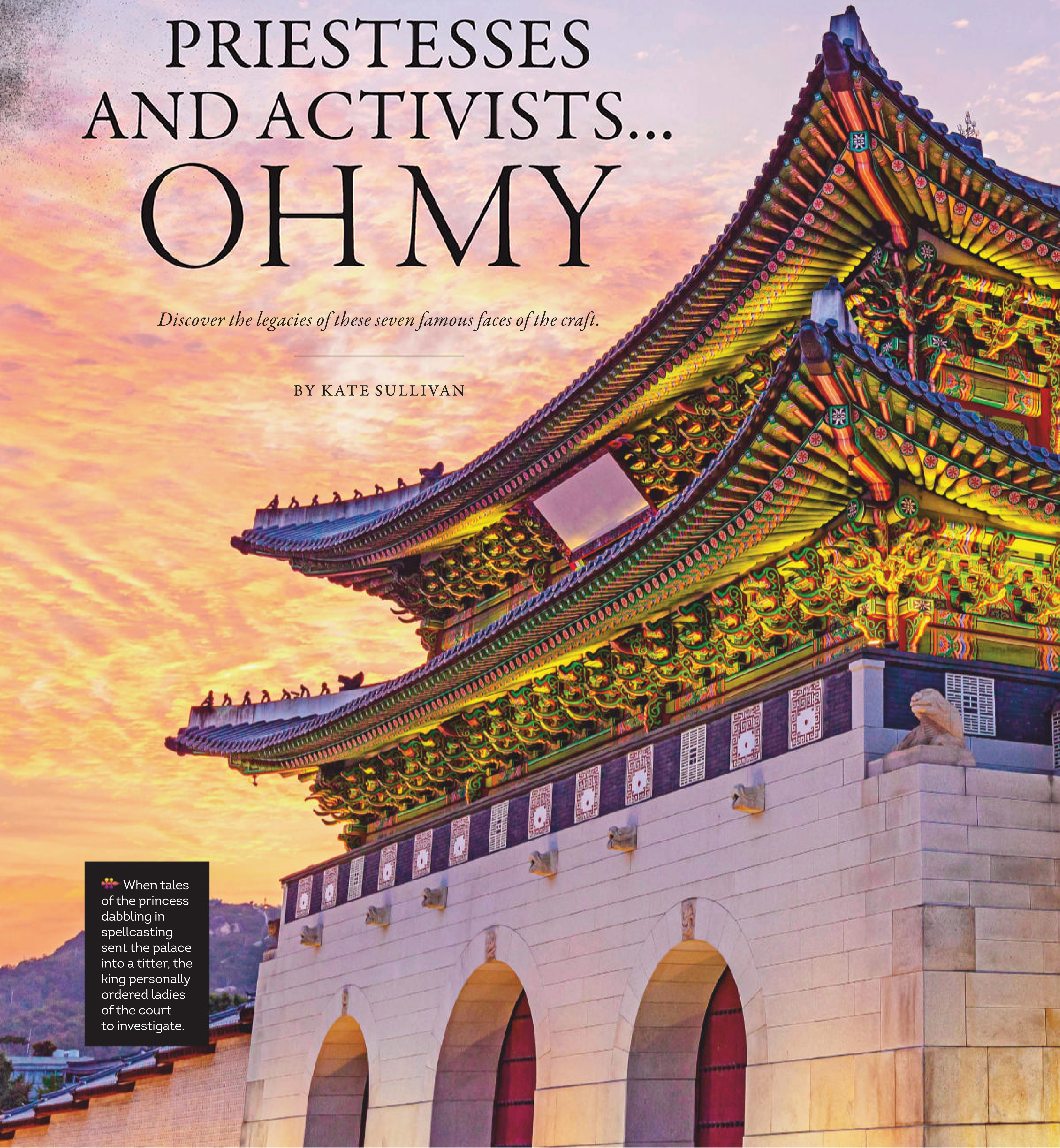
Seances held at Portsmouth resulted in charges under the Witchcraft Act of 1735 being heard at the Old Bailey to-day.

Duncan's trial at Old Bailey (the Central Criminal Court of England), was front-page news in March 1944.

HEALERS AND PRIESTESSES AND ACTIVISTS… OH MY

Discover the legacies of these seven famous faces of the craft.

BY KATE SULLIVAN



When tales of the princess dabbling in spellcasting sent the palace into a titter, the king personally ordered ladies of the court to investigate.

There's probably an easier way to win a man's heart than by wearing snake semen.

THE ROYAL

Crown Princess Hwi-bin Kim

In 1427, Korean King Sejong chose Lady Kim, the daughter of a prominent official, to be the consort of his heir Crown Prince Munjong. King Sejong wore a black crown and crimson silk robes as he elevated her to Crown Princess Hwi-bin Kim during an elaborate ceremony. By the winter of 1428, life was less glam for the Crown Princess. Though it was common practice for royal men to have multiple lovers, Hwi-bin seethed over losing Munjong's affection to two rivals. She pressed her maid, Ho-cho, for a magickal solution and began practicing witchcraft to enchant her husband.

Accounts of their crimes and punishments were recorded at the time in The Veritable Records of King Sejong. During an interrogation, Ho-cho admitted to telling the Crown Princess, "If one obtains the shoes of the man's favorite woman, burn and reduce them to ashes, and mix them with wine for the man drinking. She then can have the man's favor, and thus the other woman shall be rejected by him."

Hwi-bin tried this three times to no avail. Ho-cho then claimed she learned from two concubines that "when two snakes copulate with each other, if one gathers the sperm from the snakes with a towel and carries it in one's body, she then shall obtain the man's special favor." Hwi-bin collected a snake's fluids and wore a cloth doused in them in her husband's presence.

When bits of the leather shoes were found by another servant, rumors about Hwi-bin's spells trickled through court. In a royal edict, the king announced: "I never expected that Lady Kim would use the sorcery of yin and yang manipulation to obtain the favor [of the Crown Prince], which was discovered by a clue. Having learned this, I bust with anger."

After admitting that Ho-cho taught her witchcraft, Hwi-bin was stripped of her title and banished to her parents' home. "It shall never happen that this unruly woman shall corrupt the principle of our royal family," the king said. Ho-cho wasn't as lucky: She was imprisoned, and later the state tribunal called for her decapitation.

Citizens clamored for further investigation—surely, these two women weren't the only ones practicing dark magick. But while King Sejong denounced the women for using "feminine charms" and "sorcery," he refused to investigate the matter any further, allegedly due to his embarrassment over choosing Hwi-bin for his son.

THE SHAPE-SHIFTER

Sarah Screecham

No doubt the rumors started soon after Sarah Screecham took up a hermitlike existence in a cabin in the thick woods of South Mashpee, on Cape Cod in Massachusetts, by the aptly named Witch Pond.

Barnard College professor Elizabeth Reynard collected local Native American tribes' history and lore in 1934 and learned that Screecham hated hunters being in "her" forest. After she threatened them with "evil luck," she'd disappear, and a young doe or black mare was always seen running through the woods. The Wampanoag tribe members shot at the deer—but their arrows and bullets missed the deer every time, and no one could catch the mare.

Legend says that when Screecham fell in love with a local man, he was afraid—but wanted to learn the secret of her magick. He invited her to spend the night. At dusk, she turned into the black mare. She allowed the man to tie her to a post and put iron shoes on three of her hooves, but bucked when he put a silver one on her front left hoof, according to the books *Witches and Warlocks of Massachusetts* and *Spirit of the New England Tribes.* She escaped in the night, but was found in her cabin howling in pain with a silver horseshoe attached to her hand, her weakness revealed.

Many years later, a hunter known to be the swiftest tracker in Mashpee recalled the story. He claimed he had made a single silver bullet and ventured into Screecham's woods. She taunted the man, saying he'd fail to hunt game just like the others. She "laughed her witch-cackle," and disappeared, according to Reynard's account. Screecham was then replaced by a running doe. The hunter fired and his silver bullet landed near the deer's heart. But the doe didn't stop running and he soon lost track of it. Finally, he returned to Screecham's cabin, where he found the old woman dead, lying in front of her hearth with a bullet wound in her chest.

Sarah's not the only infamous, lore-inspiring Screecham of Cape Cod. Her sister Hannah was known for associating with pirates. Allegedly, the ruthless Hannah oversaw the burying of treasure, including Captain Kidd's.

Some say the ghosts of the Screecham sisters can still be heard deep in the Cape Cod woods.

THE HEALER

Grace Sherwood

"I be not a witch, I be healer," Grace Sherwood, a native of Virginia known as The Witch of Pungo, purportedly yelled when she was tied up and thrown into the Lynnhaven River in 1706. An innocent woman was expected to drown, the townspeople believed, whereas a witch would float—because the river's pure water would not allow a witch's evil spirit inside of it, according to historians at The Ferry Plantation in Virginia Beach.

While many stories of such water trials end in sinking, Sherwood's doesn't—she bobbed to the top of the river, unbound herself and swam to shore. "I have been drenched, but so shall you be," Sherwood supposedly told the crowd. "Then, although it was a cloudless day, a sudden clap of thunder, followed by a downpour, sent the spectators running," according to *Virginia Myths and Legends: The True Stories Behind History's Mysteries*. Sherwood thus became the only person convicted of witchcraft in Virginia via a trial by water. But instead of being sentenced to death, Sherwood was granted a second trial. There's no record of its outcome, but Sherwood was quietly released from custody by 1714. She went on to live as a free woman until she died at age 80. This is just one example of her long string of good luck.

Robert Cunningham's statue of Grace Sherwood features a raccoon to show her love of animals, and a basket of rosemary to represent her nursing skills. It stands outside a Virginia hospital.

Sherwood, a midwife who grew herbs with which she'd heal people and animals, had been accused of witchcraft by multiple neighbors, dozens of times, for years. None of the charges stuck; she even won some defamation and slander cases. The accusations ran the gamut, alleging Sherwood cursed crops, sickened animals and caused storms. Neighbor Elizabeth Barnes claimed that Sherwood had entered her bedchamber, ridden her like a horse and then escaped the room by turning into a black cat and slipping through the keyhole. Court documents show that Barnes was later a forewoman on a jury of women in a case against Sherwood; judges dismissed the evidence presented as biased.

Perhaps Sherwood's critics suffered from hate-her-cause-they-ain't-her. After all, the tall and beautiful Sherwood and her husband owned an expansive 195-acre farm. The unusual woman, said to have a great sense of humor, helped her husband work the farm—while wearing pants, according to *USA Today*. So, was it truly witchcraft that led to these repeated accusations, or jealousy? Twenty-first-century historian Belinda Nash believed it was the latter. Nash pleaded with three different Virginia governors to have the midwife's name cleared. Finally, in 2006, 300 years after her trial, Sherwood was granted an informal pardon. A statue was erected in her memory near a hospital, both because Sherwood was a healer—and because a local church protested that it not be placed near their property.

THE POSTMASTER

Katharina Henot

A genial, middle-aged woman, Katharina Henot, who was born in 1570, worked as the first female postmaster in Cologne, Germany, after the death of her father, who'd previously held the post. According to a translated account, she and her siblings took over the position secretly, concealing their father's death and signing his name to official documents. When they were discovered, they lost the prestigious gig—and added to their list of political enemies.

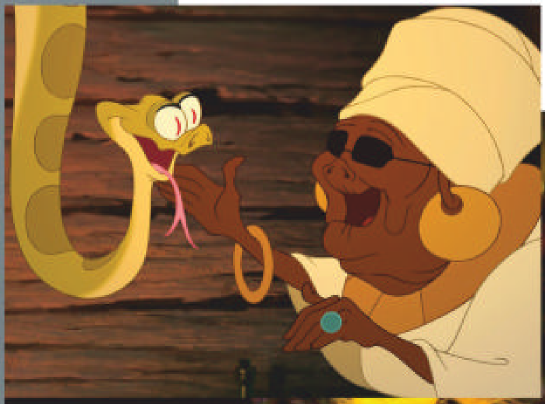
Still, Henot came from a prominent family. Her brothers had impressive careers, and her sister and daughter were both nuns in the Clarisse Convent in Cologne, but it was there that the trouble started. In 1626, a group of nuns appeared possessed. During their exorcism, they all said that they had been bewitched by Henot, and according to a translated article from the Rhineland History Portal, "that they could only recover if the witch and devil's paramour [was] dealt with the utmost severity."

Ultimately arrested, Henot wrote now-famous letters from prison proclaiming that she was not a witch. She wrote with her left hand, as her right was too damaged from torture. Henot was tortured three times and did not confess, something her brother Hartgar insisted proved her innocence. Her captors disagreed, sentencing her to death for numerous crimes, among them five counts of using magick to kill. Henot's execution set off a rash of witch hunts in Cologne from 1627 to 1630; 33 trials followed, with at least 24 women executed.

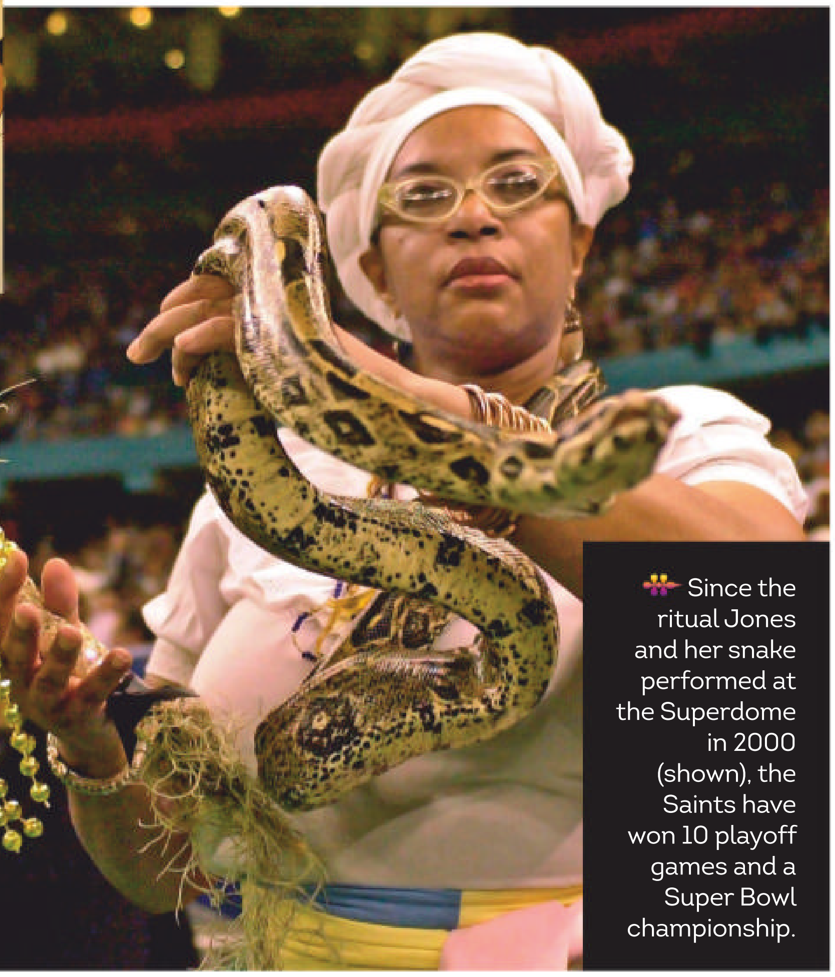
Today, Henot's persecution is seen as political, and her trial unjust. In 1989, a sculpture of Henot was added to the town hall, and she was portrayed as a victim in the movie *Die Hexe von Köln* (*The Witch of Cologne*). In 2012, 385 years after her death, she was retried and exonerated.

A descendant of Henot's said the gesture, while great, was not enough. "She should have her name cleared," Martina Hirtz told *The Daily Mail*. "But I think of the endless amount of people still...being mistreated and find that much worse."

A statue of Katharina Henot is one of the many figures on the facade of the historic town hall in Cologne, Germany.



"Mama Odie and I are priestesses of the light," Ava Kay Jones has said about *The Princess and the Frog* character she inspired.



Since the ritual Jones and her snake performed at the Superdome in 2000 (shown), the Saints have won 10 playoff games and a Super Bowl championship.

THE VOODOO PRIESTESS

Ava Kay Jones

Born on Halloween in New Orleans, Ava Kay Jones, a Voodoo and Yoruba priestess, takes pride in keeping the traditions of the city's legendary 19th-century Voodoo queen Marie Laveau. Jones crafts poppets and mojo bags (for healing or luck) and makes regular appearances with her snake, Bubbles. A renowned expert on Voodoo and African spirituality, she has lectured at the New Orleans Museum of Art.

"In [Laveau's] days, a Voodoo priestess took spells off the people, and she knew how to visit the spirit world," Jones explains. "As a Voodoo priestess in today's world, I represent and teach the culture of Voodoo, use a little gris-gris (mojo) and prayer to bless people, and attend my Catholic Church in the French Quarter often."

She famously shared with the storytelling series The Moth how she became the priestess of the NFL. In December 2000, ahead of the New Orleans Saints' wildcard playoff game, she was contacted by the team "to perform a miracle in the Superdome." The facility was built atop an ancient cemetery, and some attributed the Saints' abysmal record (they hadn't won a playoff in 34 years) to this offense. Before 67,000 fans, Jones, her Voodoo Mkumba Dance Ensemble and a boa constrictor "brought fruits and flowers for the ancestors," and a fifth of Gordon's Dry Gin—"for the spirits, of course," she notes. She invoked the goddess of change, Oya, and felt that the spirits under the dome were at peace. But "being a good Catholic girl," she also went to church to call on St. Jude, the saint of impossible causes. The Saints won the game after a St. Louis Rams fumble.

Disney also made use of Jones' expertise as a consultant on the Louisiana-set animated feature *The Princess and the Frog*. She inspired the character of wacky and wise Voodoo priestess Mama Odie—who also has a pet snake!

THE DEFIANT

Ipsita Roy Chakraverti

In India, where Ipsita Roy Chakraverti lives, witches are still persecuted, especially in rural communities. "If any strong woman stands up for her rights, she's still called a 'daayan' or a 'witch,'" she says.

The activist and author of the memoir *Beloved Witch* took a cultural risk declaring herself a Wiccan priestess in 1986, but being from an influential family—her father was a diplomat, her mother "old Bengal aristocracy"—gave some protection. "I said, 'I am a witch, burn me if you dare.' [Critics] slunk away, and hid in the darkness," she says. "They hated me behind my back but were too afraid to speak out."

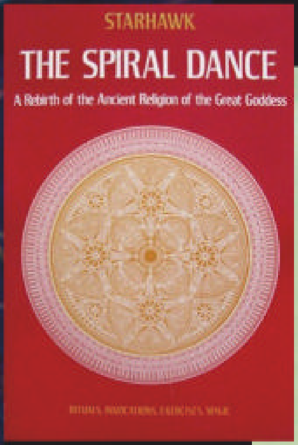
Chakraverti practices a combination of Western and Eastern traditions. "I follow the conviction that the Goddess is one, but her manifestations are many," she says. "I have come to see Wicca not as divided by regions, but rather united by a common way of life and as a scholarly path."

She leads an international community called the Wiccan Brigade. "We follow Wiccan ceremonial days as well as Eastern prayer days," she says. "I do Wiccan Sanctuary days online and try to help those in need spiritually and mentally...the old ways [can] take away many of the abrasions of the modern world."

IPSITA ROY CHAKRAVERTI

THE HIGH PRIES

Starhawk is the author of more than a dozen novels and nonfiction books. Her work has been cited as one of the main inspirations behind the popular Goddess movement.



For two years, Starhawk struggled to find a publisher for *The Spiral Dance*. When Harper & Row finally released it in 1979, it became an instant bestseller; Two anniversary editions have since been published.

SA
LOU
Occupy
+ Unions

Starhawk demonstrates how to act while being pushed by police at a 2012 Occupy Midwest conference in St. Louis.

THE ACTIVIST

Starhawk

"One of the reasons why people fear the word 'witch' so much is that it brings up ideas about women's power," Starhawk (born Miriam Simos) says in the 1990 documentary *The Burning Times*. "For 5,000 years or longer, we have been propagandized to fear women's power." Thus, the Minnesota-born pagan insists on using the word witch to describe herself to dispel such biases.

This didn't quite work with the Vatican, who name-checked Starhawk in a mandate it issued in the 1980s. At the time, Starhawk was teaching at a Catholic college and the church instructed her colleague, Dominican priest Matthew Fox, to disassociate himself from "Wicca, the ideology of Starhawk." In the documentary, Fox says angry Catholics sent him strikingly vehement hate mail. "I thought that the burning of witches was settled several centuries ago."

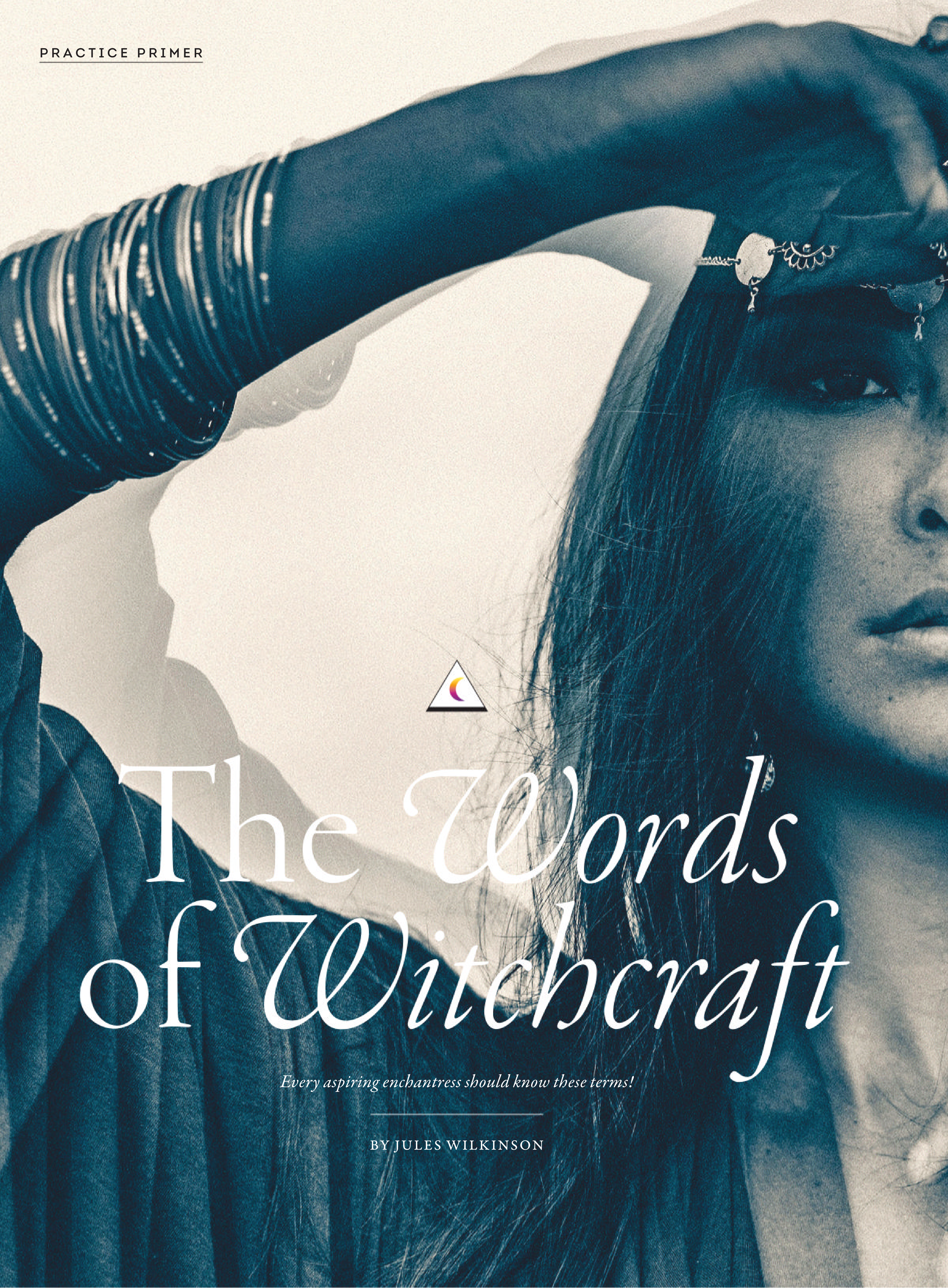
Starhawk, a member of the Covenant of the Goddess (CoG), recognized as a church since 1975, shares her faith through her writing; she has authored and co-authored many books and essays. Her first spiritual text, the popular *The Spiral Dance* (1979), outlined rituals and included poetry. It was followed by books that combine lessons on Wicca, ecofeminism and social justice activism.

Starhawk's feminist and earth-based spirituality informs her community and ecological work. She's an anti-war and anti-racism activist and advocates for permaculture design, which uses nature as a model for creating sustainable farming and environment regenerating projects. Speaking at Harvard Divinity School, she explained what attracted her to paganism in the 1970s: "There's a religion that says there's a goddess, that Earth is sacred, that nature is sacred, that says that sexuality is sacred, women's bodies are sacred, that says to me, a young woman, there are no barriers to my moving forward and taking leadership."

PART 2

THE CRAFT TODAY

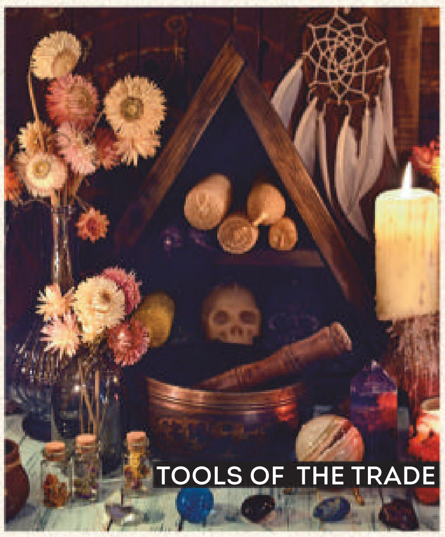
BRUSH UP ON YOUR VOCABULARY WITH THESE KEY TERMS. FIND OUT WHAT REALLY GOES ON IN MODERN COVENS, AND GET YOUR PARTY ON DURING THE EIGHT SABBATS. PLUS, MEET SOME ENCHANTED ACTIVISTS.



The *Words* of *Witchcraft*

Every aspiring enchantress should know these terms!

BY JULES WILKINSON



Altar

A witch's altar is a sacred space representing the essence of her practice. It's usually a raised platform of some type—it may be a table, stool or bench, a rock or a tree stump. You can even buy one custom-made on Etsy! One approach is to include items to represent each of the elements, such as crystals for earth, a candle for fire, incense for air and blessed water. Or you can decorate the altar with objects of meaning to you and your craft.

Astral Projection

If you want to travel without all the hassles of long queues and cramped seats, then astral projection is for you! It's usually undertaken through meditation or directed dreaming and allows your consciousness to leave your body and journey through the astral plane. Here, you may journey to other places on the physical plane, contact spirits or other travelers, enter other people's dreams or even traverse time.

Aura

The aura is a manifestation of the energy of any life-form. Its size, color or vibration can provide insight into its emotional, psychic and physical well-being. Some practitioners can sense people's auras, while others use special techniques called Kirlian photography to capture them. Auras have layers, with each corresponding to a different chakra.

Besom

A traditional broom made of a bunch of fine twigs tied to a long straight pole, it's used to prepare and cleanse a ritual space by sweeping out the negative energies in the room. In some Wiccan practices, couples jump over a besom during their handfasting (a Celtic ritual akin to marriage). In the popular imagination, besoms are associated with witches in flight. This is thought to have originated from the idea that they used the besom to rub hallucinogens on their genitals, which induced visions of flying.

Witches on a budget can find many items secondhand, or even make their own.

Black Magick

This is the dark side of the craft: It's the use of magick for selfish or wicked purposes or associated with evil beings. There is much controversy around the term, as it is often used to label practitioners or practices that are disapproved of rather than those that are truly seeking to harm others. Modern Wicca concentrates on the user's intent to distinguish between black and white magick.

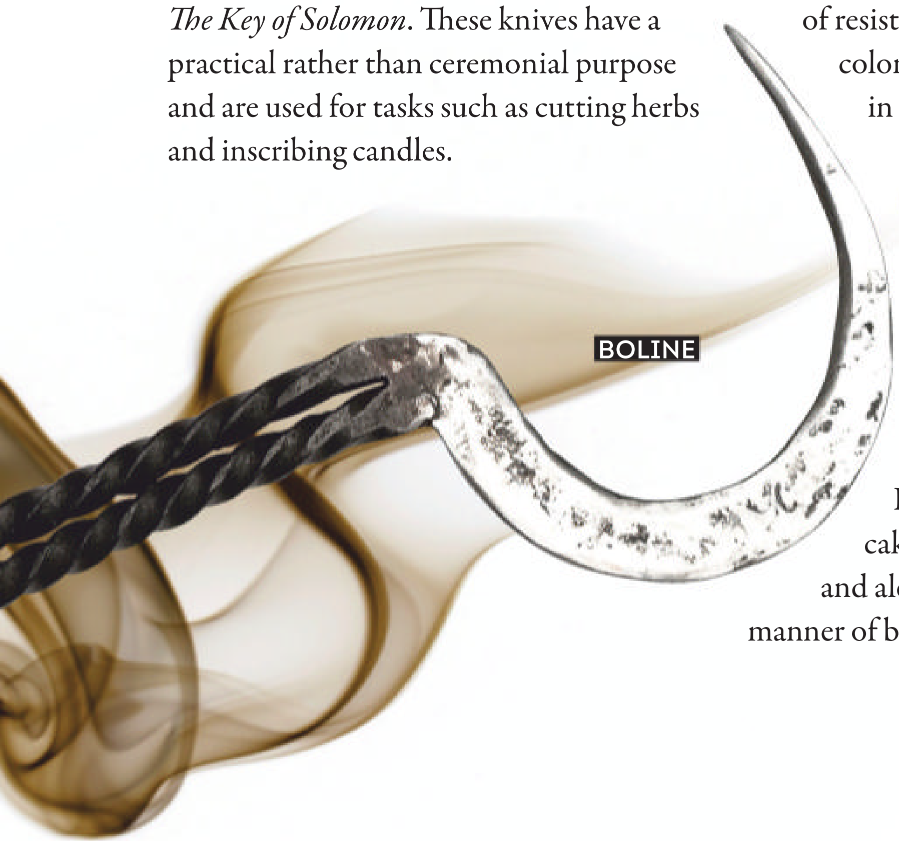
A wand and a book of shadows can be as ornate or as ordinary as a witch wants them to be.

Blessed Be

A phrase that offers good and positive energy upon a person. These days it's also used by many as a greeting or parting phrase to another witch, either in person or written communications—including emails and tweets! #blessedbe

Boline

A small, white-handled knife, it can have a straight blade or one that is sickle-shaped as depicted in the medieval grimoire, *The Key of Solomon*. These knives have a practical rather than ceremonial purpose and are used for tasks such as cutting herbs and inscribing candles.



Bruja

Meaning "witch" in Spanish, the term is used for practitioners in Latin American and Afro-Caribbean countries. In Brujería, there's a blend of religious and spiritual practices that contains Indigenous and African influences alongside European ones, with a topping of Roman Catholicism. In an interview with *Teen Vogue*, São Paulo-based Wiccan Priestess Marília de Abreu, described the importance of Brujería as a "form of resistance and self-identity" for colonized and enslaved peoples in the region.

Cakes and Wine

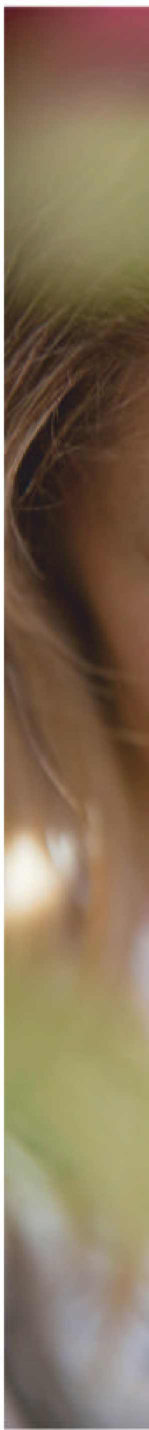
Wiccan rituals often end with the sharing of food and drinks as a moment of thanksgiving and a celebration of the abundance of the divine. It doesn't have to literally be cakes and wine; it could be bread and ale, cookies and milk or any manner of baked goods and a libation.

Cauldron

One of the most recognizable of a witch's tools, the cauldron is a big rounded iron pot, whose shape suggests the swelling belly of a pregnant woman, symbolizing fertility and also transformation. Its three legs represent the three aspects of the Great Goddess or the three Fates. Traditionally, it was the pot in which fire, the source of life, was started. There's not usually a lot of room in modern homes for traditional cauldrons, so much smaller versions are available. They're used for burning incense, brewing potions, making black salt (a mixture of black ash and salt used in spells) or moon water.

Chakras

This Sanskrit word for "wheel" describes a concept found in both Hindu and Buddhist teachings that there are specific entry points for life energy in the body. Energy flows around the body through these points, and these pathways influence a person's physical, emotional and spiritual well-being. The main chakras are the crown, third eye,

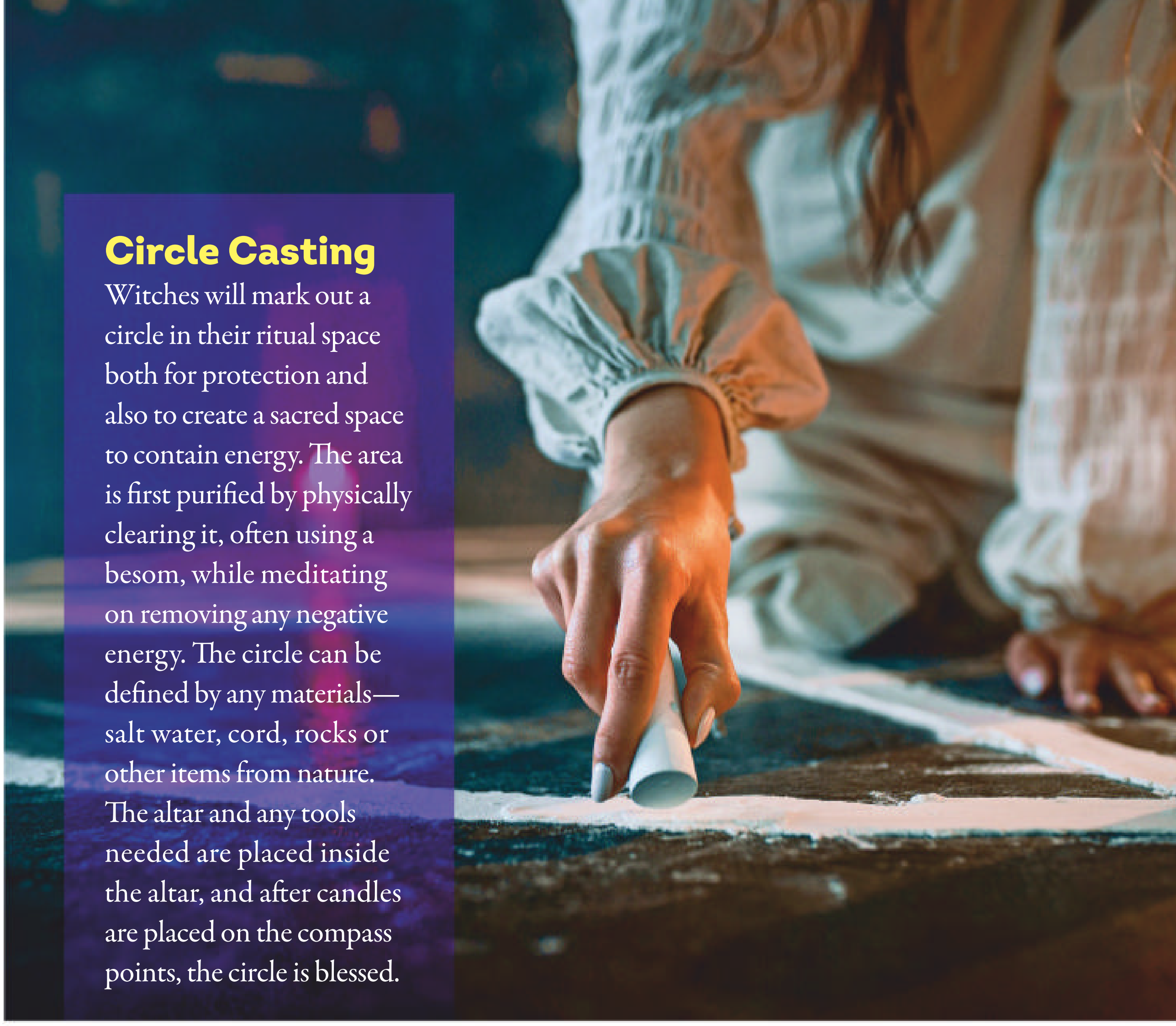


throat, heart, solar plexus, sacral and root chakra. They were adopted into Western practice from the 1880s; in the 1920s they were each associated with a different color. Crystals and herbs are associated with opening the chakras to heal or help the flow of energy in the body.

Coven

A coven is a group of three or more witches who undertake rituals and spells and celebrate festivals together. Covens were traditionally led by a high priestess and a high priest, although now they can be of any gender. Most covens are very close and tight-knit groups, which help guide new initiates and support one another on their path. In the internet age, there are now cybercovens; they have been integral in connecting people who would be otherwise isolated from a community.

Some witches use crystals such as rose quartz to help balance their chakras.



Circle Casting

Witches will mark out a circle in their ritual space both for protection and also to create a sacred space to contain energy. The area is first purified by physically clearing it, often using a besom, while meditating on removing any negative energy. The circle can be defined by any materials—salt water, cord, rocks or other items from nature. The altar and any tools needed are placed inside the altar, and after candles are placed on the compass points, the circle is blessed.

Divination

An umbrella term for a diverse range of magickal practices used to foretell future events and uncover hidden knowledge. The witch will use her own sensitivities and skills to read and interpret signs provided by the medium deployed. It's one of the common reasons a person may consult the services of a witch. Some of the most popular practices involve tarot cards, runes and crystal scrying.

Hedge Witch

These are usually solitary practitioners, whose craft is closely aligned with nature. The term comes from the village witches who lived outside of the main community, literally beyond the hedgerows that marked the boundaries. Hedgerows are diverse ecosystems that serve as a home to myriad plants and animals that were used by the hedge witch. Modern hedge witches center their practice on the home and garden and undertake all activities there with intent and magick. They do travel—but usually on the astral plane or through lucid dreaming.

Hex

Coming from hexe, the German word for witch, a hex is a negative spell cast against a person, object or event, in order to cause harm or bad luck to befall them.

Kitchen Witch

Not to be confused with kitchen witchcraft, which is a domestic food-centered practice, this is a small doll that is kept in the kitchen to ward off bad spirits. Thought to have originated in northern Europe, they are made in the image of a good witch and are often accompanied by a poem that may be a variation on the following: "Nothing spills, nothing spoils, overcooks or overboils. The Kitchen Witch upon her broom brings luck and love to any room."

Lucid Dreaming

Dreams often are valuable in providing us with insights to guide our growth and self-understanding. In a lucid dream, the person is aware they are asleep and dreaming. They can be active participants and even direct the narrative of the dream. Lucid dreaming is a learned skill and witches usually aid the process with meditation and teas made with the appropriate herbs.

Manifestation

A concept that has sparked vision boards across the world, manifesting is the idea of bringing something desired into your life. Witches, however, know that it takes more than saying a few affirmations to achieve. With the belief that all comes from the divine, a witch's practice in honoring

Runes can be translated as “secrets” or “whispers.” Most commonly they’re written on stones.

the divine is part of the process, so you can receive back the energy you put out. Symbolically this may involve devotions and offerings at your altar, and in practice sharing your gifts and energies to support those around you.

Moon Water

The recipe is simple—put some water out in the moonlight and the next morning you have moon water! The best water to use is rainwater or that from a running creek or river collected in a cauldron or glass jar. Sometimes crystals are used to enhance the power of the moon's energy. The ritual can be done during any phase of the moon; the full moon is considered the strongest but avoid the lunar eclipse, as the shadow cast on the moon is a time to release energy, not collect it. Moon water can be used as an elixir or in potions.

Necromancy

Also known as death magick, this is a form of magick that can be very dangerous, although it's not necessarily evil. Necromancy involves communicating with the dead, which in past times actually involved reanimation of the corpse, although now it's more likely to involve summoning spirits. The dead can pass on secrets to the living, and also foretell the future as they exist on a plane where time is not linear. It usually involves complex rituals and the use of tools such as a Ouija board.

Rule of Three

Whatever you send out there, you get back times three. Many people learned of this Golden Rule of Wicca through its use in the 1996 movie *The Craft*, where the protagonists must deal with the negative consequences that result from their spells that harm others. Some traditions interpret this literally, while others take it more as a metaphor that both encourages good and warns against bad behavior.

Runes

These symbols were used to write early Germanic languages dating back over 2,000 years and were also the basis for a system of runic magick. The runes are usually carved or painted on small stones or tiles, or on cards. Practitioners must study and undertake focused meditation in order to best understand their significance. Their most common use is to foretell future events or understand hidden meanings in past or present ones.

Skyclad

Digambara is a branch of the Indian religion Jainism, whose monks had no possessions including clothes (the word means "skyclad," a reference to their nudity). This practice possibly influenced Druidic practices and became incorporated into pagan and Wiccan rituals. By being naked, witches can be closer to nature, with nothing between them and the divine, allowing the free flow of energy.

Smudging

Smudging is a Native American ritual used to purify a space from negative energies left behind by a person or event that occurred there. The practice involves the burning of herbs, each of which has a sacred meaning and medicinal property. As they burn, the smoke is drafted around the home or room with a feather, and a prayer is recited. These days smudging kits can be bought everywhere, but many witches consider their use a form of cultural appropriation and choose to undertake different cleansing rituals.

Wiccan Rede

Do what you will, so long as it harms none. Known as the Wiccan rede, these words appeared in the work of Gerald Gardner and provide a guideline for the ethics of witchcraft. Of course the words are open to interpretation and they aren't adopted by all witches, or even all Wiccans. Rather than literally meaning to harm nothing, many witches take the rede to mean that you should always act with good intentions.

Witches and nonwitches often use a sage smudge to clear energies from a new home.

Witch Mark

These are sigils found on a building's entrance that are ways to bar witches and other spirits from entering. A commonly used one is the daisy wheel that traces six-lobed "flower" patterns inside a circle. They have been found in churches and barns in England, some being hundreds of years old.

CONTEMPORARY

COVENS

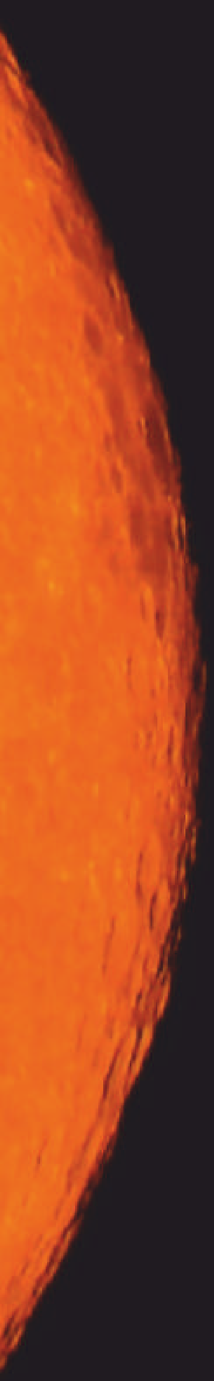
When witches gather together, the results can be pure magick.

BY AMY L. HOGAN

“COVENS [TODAY] REPRESENT A HEALING OF OUR COLLECTIVE WITCH WOUNDS.”

Author Tenae Stewart

Before anti-witchcraft laws were repealed, covens often met in secret. Now many witches feel they can come out of the (broom) closet.



Many covens hold monthly meetings that coincide with the full moon.

Is there singing and chanting around a cauldron? Is it BYOB—bring your own besom? Will there be naked dancing?

These are the kinds of questions that modern witches get asked regarding what really goes on in contemporary covens.

The truth? Working together *can* be a magickal experience for many witches.

“The amount of power and sense of purpose that can be created by a group in lieu of a singular witch is palpable in the circle,” says Levi Rowland, an Alexandrian high priest from New Orleans. “It is powerful and beautiful to be a part of a tradition, a lineage, a community of witches that spans so many different countries, social strata and personalities. Carrying something on that was passed down to you is a precious thing.”

Perhaps not surprisingly, the vast majority of modern witches are solo practitioners. But connecting with others, whether online or in person, is gaining popularity for several reasons, including the protection, strength and sense of family that covens can provide.

“For me, a coven is not a social sphere that you come to when you are in the mood,” says Rowland. “It is a commitment to working with others and honoring the divine, within and without.”

In addition, belonging to one of these modern circles can give practicing witches a sense of security and belonging that hasn’t always been possible.

“Historically, it has been very unsafe to be known as a witch or gather with others who share similar beliefs,” says Tenae Stewart, author of *The Modern Witch’s Guide to Magickal Self-Care.* “By slowly beginning to emerge from our solitary paths and gather with other like-minded witches in contemporary covens of all kinds, we are healing and uplifting ourselves and future generations.”

A familiar, such as the traditional black cat, may participate in magickal work, but it's important the animal isn't coerced and chooses to enter freely.

WITCHES ON THE WEB

Social media is bringing practitioners out of the woodwork.

No fellow practitioners in your area? No worries. Social media provides the perfect platform for expanding and enhancing practices from the comfort of your phone. "Users can freely obtain information about the craft with just a few keystrokes–that kind of knowledge could have taken previous generations months to track down," says Pennsylvania-based high priest Jason Myers. "Whether you're a baby witch, a solitaire seeking cyber companions or an elder looking to stay in touch, social media presents a multitude of methods to connect and feel a sense of communal belonging." Indeed. Instagram has 974,000-plus posts with #coven; on TikTok, #coven has 1.2 billion views.

There's a dearth of data on witches in the U.S., but Manny Tejeda-Moreno, editor of The Wild Hunt, a news service spotlighting the community, has said the rise of witches on social media suggests an "observable difference in the number of people practicing witchcraft and the number of people willing to discuss that practice openly."

Familial Connections

The word coven itself is open to interpretation. Some are casual groups of three or four friends who sometimes gather to celebrate the full moon or other Sabbats. A more traditional coven, however, consists of 13 witches and is led by a high priestess.

Witches were early adapters of the internet, so many modern covens are more like online learning spaces, where dozens, hundreds or even thousands share their knowledge and abilities. Others meet in person and cast their circles in designated sacred spaces with a fixed altar. Other covens gather in coffee shops or bookstores to discuss current events and perhaps hex the patriarchy.

"I think this diversity makes contemporary covens so powerful—these are safe spaces where we can find like-minded people to share our practices and beliefs," Stewart says.

"The biggest misconception people have of witches and our gatherings is that we are somehow not people but storybook characters," says Christopher Penczak, an author, high priest and co-founder of the Temple of Witchcraft in Salem, New Hampshire. "While different, what we do is no more strange than other folk traditions and spiritual practices."

Having a reliable "family" is a perk of joining a close-knit coven, since the craft can sometimes seem overwhelming, often making a practitioner feel less powerful. Knowing the coven has their back can give a power boost and ease that burden. "When a group of witches is of one mind towards something, there is an immense strength to manifest and intention," says Penczak.

According to Penczak, covens that work intimately together can share both on a personal and an energetic level, allowing members to go deeper in their magickal practice and spiritual evolution. "Having teachers and elders in a group helps lead the entire group to a deeper level, [one that] might be harder to get to on their own," he adds.

"A witchcraft ritual with ten people just feels different than a witchcraft ritual performed alone," agrees Jason Mankey, author of *The Horned God of the Witches*. He and his wife Ari run two covens in Northern California. "When you have a bunch of witches together in a circle, you can feel the power being raised, the temperature in the room goes up, and the air begins to feel like soup. It's intoxicating. And that extra energy makes spellwork more effective."

Pulling Back the Curtain

But what about the brooms and chants and cauldrons?

"Are there covens that dance naked? Most certainly," says Mankey. "Many witches dance around the altar, a fire, a tree or a stone as a method of raising energy and getting in touch with the divine spirit."

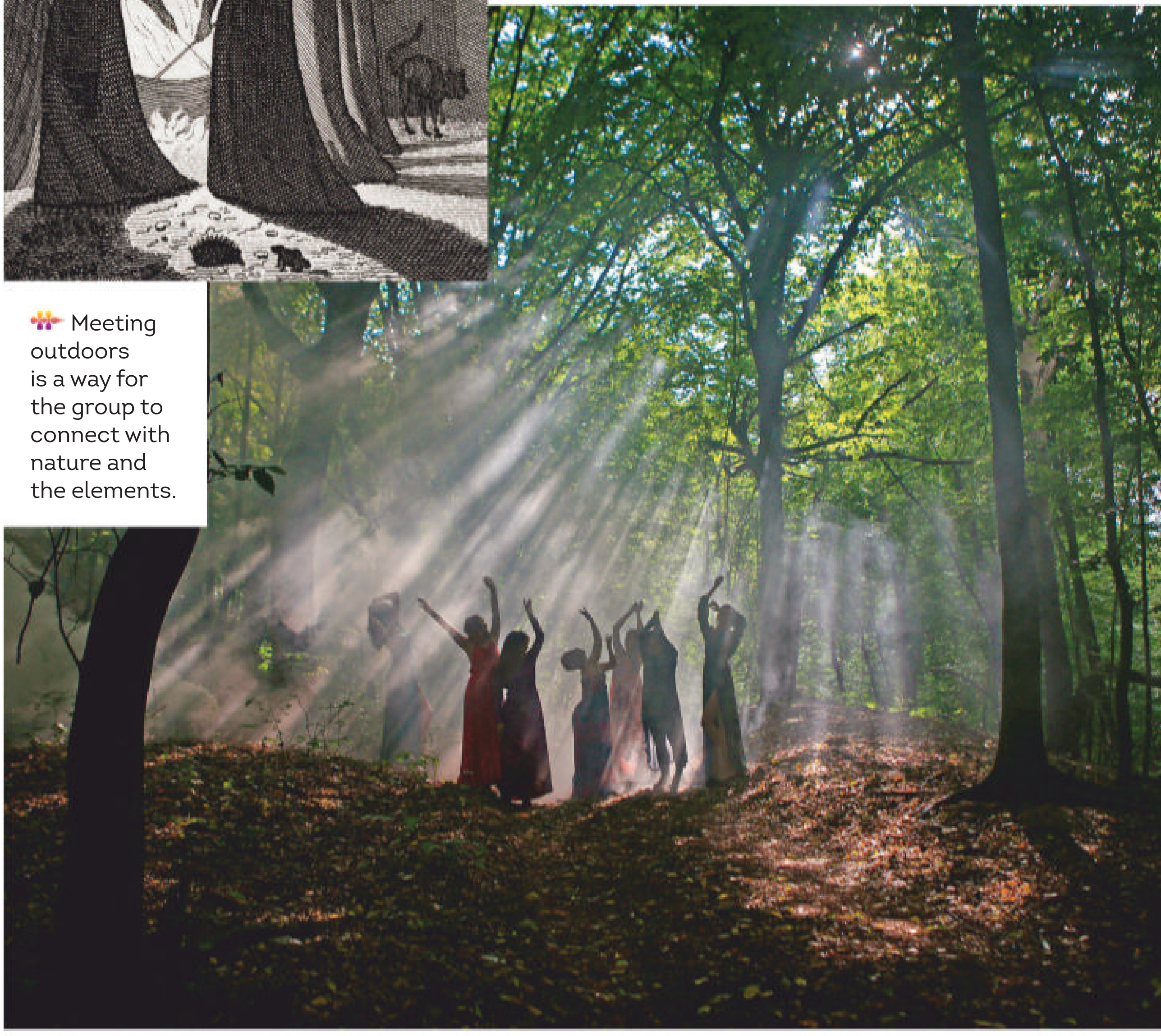
"In some traditions, it is a very healing aspect of accepting your body and creating a level of equality and intimacy among the group through trust," adds Penczak. "The traditions I am involved in are more formal, usually wearing black robes. And while not frequent, some are known to wear ritual hats and hoods, which are things that others might consider stereotypical. But it has been a part of the culture of the craft."

According to Jason Myers, a Pennsylvania-based priest in the Cabot tradition of witchcraft, most larger groups of witches gather to celebrate pagan holidays, such as the eight Sabbats that make up the Wheel of the Year. "We also gather for spellcasting, occult education and fellowship," he says.

Meanwhile, Alicia Farmer—a Salt Lake City-based alchemist/hermetic witch—was a part of several covens before forming one with her own family. She says a gathering for her coven "typically happens on a full moon or Sabbat." There are usually four to five people involved, and "they each represent an element—air, fire, water, earth—and our coven. We usually begin most spells by opening a circle. A traditional circle consists of calling the elements forward, protecting the circle, opening it, completing the spell work and closing it afterward."

Environmentalism was a key facet for Kat Tigner, a Gardnerian high priestess from Columbus, Ohio, who's been practicing for 52 years and cofounded the Temple of Sacrifice coven with Raymond Buckland in 2005. "One of our main goals is to help protect and preserve our planet," she says. "Our coven is a family with deep bonds. We care for and heal each other on a daily basis." It doesn't get much better than that.

> **"THERE IS SOMETHING VERY POWERFUL ABOUT RITUALS—COMING TOGETHER TO EXPRESS COLLECTIVE INTENT."**
>
> *Alchemist Alicia Farmer*



Meeting outdoors is a way for the group to connect with nature and the elements.

STIRRING The Cauldron

Witches have long been disrupting oppressive social systems, and that legacy continues today.

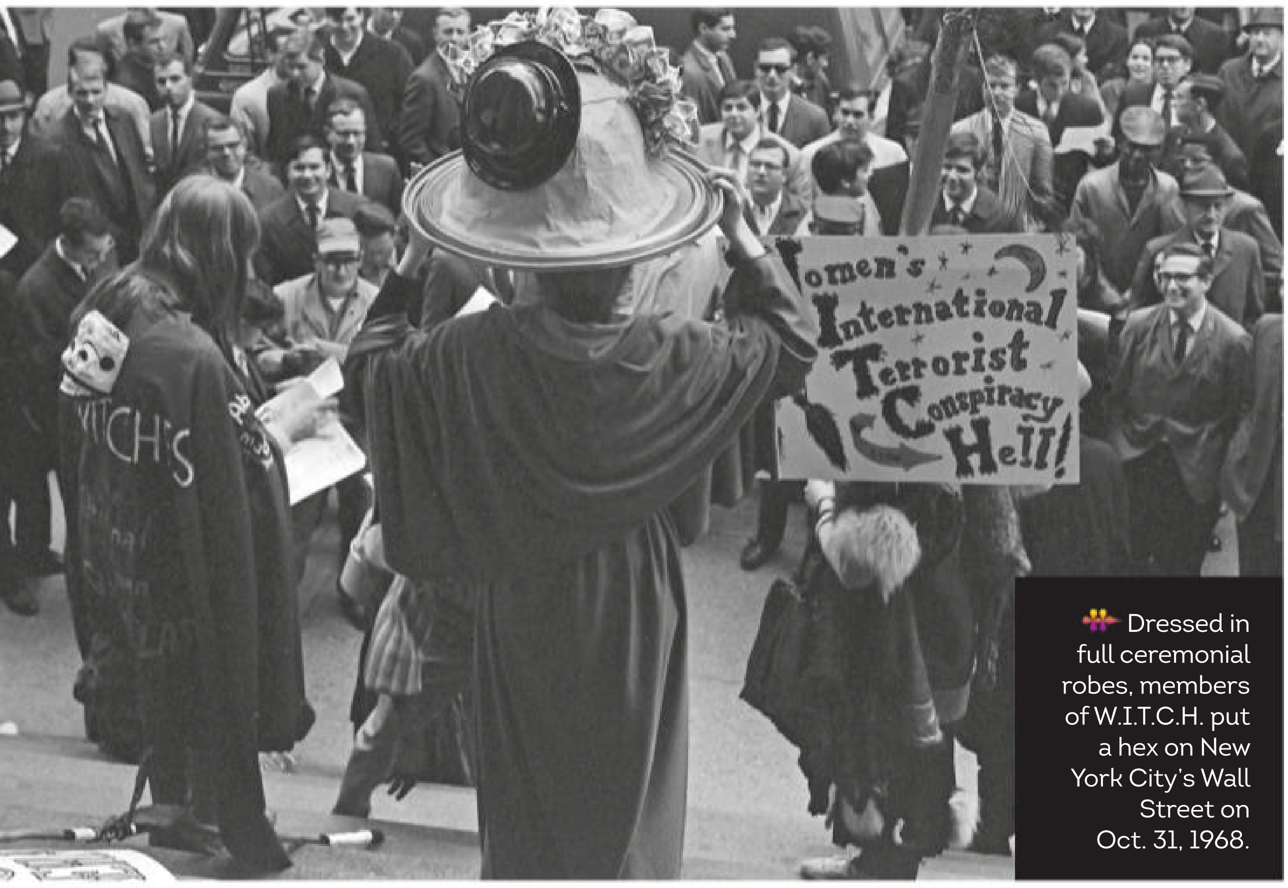
BY DANIELLE SIMONE BRAND

They've always had a bad reputation—at least in the eyes of the patriarchy. Whether using herbal medicine to control fertility or divinatory tools to glimpse the future, or simply living independently outside of social norms, witches (or those accused of the craft) have often played the role of the "nasty woman."

"Witchcraft historically has been about marginalized people taking their power back, finding underground ways to subvert the system, or getting support to those who need it," says vegan activist and Chicago-based witch, Marla Rose. "Indeed, being a witch is an inherently political position."

Perhaps no group has made the connection more clear than the Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy From Hell (W.I.T.C.H.), which was founded in 1968 in New York City by a group of feminists and anti-capitalists. Cognizant of the heresy of the symbol, they purposefully chose to portray themselves as witches. According to the group's manifesto: "W.I.T.C.H. is…an awareness that witches and gypsies were the original guerrillas and resistance fighters against oppression…. Witches have always been women who dared to be: groovy, courageous, aggressive, intelligent, nonconformist, explorative, curious, independent, sexually liberated, revolutionary. (This possibly explains why nine million of them have been burned.)" Notably in the late '60s, they donned traditional black hats and dresses and marched on Wall Street to put a hex on the male-dominated financial system, and protested a bridal fair being held at Madison Square Garden.

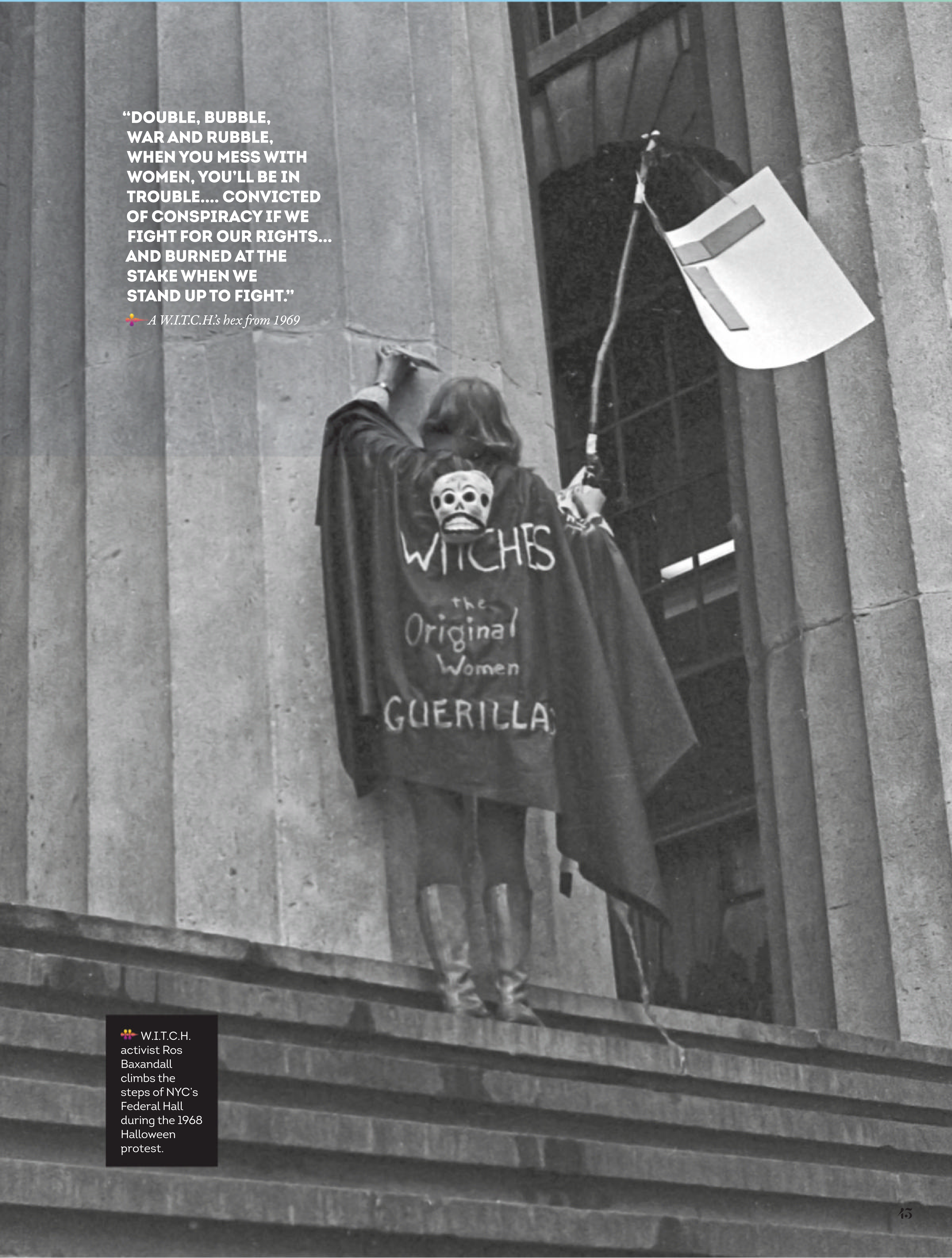
In the intervening decades, interest in witchcraft has grown exponentially


omen's International Terrorist Conspiracy Hell!
WITCH'S

Dressed in full ceremonial robes, members of W.I.T.C.H. put a hex on New York City's Wall Street on Oct. 31, 1968.

MARLA ROSE
Valerie Vegiburger

> **"DOUBLE, BUBBLE, WAR AND RUBBLE, WHEN YOU MESS WITH WOMEN, YOU'LL BE IN TROUBLE.... CONVICTED OF CONSPIRACY IF WE FIGHT FOR OUR RIGHTS... AND BURNED AT THE STAKE WHEN WE STAND UP TO FIGHT."**
>
> *A W.I.T.C.H.'s hex from 1969*


WITCHES
the
Original
Women
GUERILLAS

W.I.T.C.H. activist Ros Baxandall climbs the steps of NYC's Federal Hall during the 1968 Halloween protest.

and the symbol of the witch has become commonplace at protests and marches.

Here, a few disrupters explain how the craft is tied to their activism.

Hexing for Progress

Brooklyn-based witch, Dakota St. Clare (formerly Bracciale), co-owner of the occult-themed Catland Books, has made a name by leading group hexes against public figures associated with the mistreatment of women and marginalized people. The rituals hosted by St. Clare and Catland have two parts. The first, public part of the ritual, says St. Clare, is about "channeling our righteous rage—and directing it at those who have done us wrong and the oppressive forces that back them up."

The second, private part, is called the Rites of the Scorned One and centers on caring for one another in times of persecution or duress. During a 2018 hex on Brett Kavanaugh—who was accused of sexual assault during his Supreme Court confirmation hearings—participants were invited to take the floor and share their own stories of assault, disrespect or subjugation. As each personal share concluded, the group would repeat, "We hear you, we believe you." This healing-oriented support is a particularly potent aspect of the work. Says St. Clare, "I still get messages saying 'that's the first time I spoke about what happened,' and more heartbreakingly, 'that's the first time someone said they believed me.'"

In 2016, a witch attended a political demonstration in Berlin calling for more tolerance in society.

DAKOTA ST. CLARE

WE ARE THE GRANDDAUGHTERS OF THE WITCHES YOU COULDN'T BURN
FOCUS

With her sign, an attendee at a 2021 women's reproductive rights rally in Tulsa, Oklahoma, references how healers and midwives were often targets of witch trials.

Witchcraft, according to St. Clare, has long held a "subversive, radical, anti-authoritarian aspect." Across many different cultures and moments, it's been about cultivating resilience for some of the most disempowered—the idea, says St. Clare, "that I will not resign to my circumstances. I will do all I can to protect me and mine."

But it's a bit of revisionist history, St. Clare adds, to categorize historical witches as the "feminist icon, queen girl-boss we need," because that doesn't take into account everyone—including people of color, queer and gender-varied folks—who were also oppressed. The Catland Books community is about uplifting all marginalized groups, which is at odds, says St. Clare, with some of the more sanitized, commercial versions of witchcraft today.

In June, Catland announced a hex against the Supreme Court justices who struck down *Roe v. Wade* and those who abetted them, like President Donald Trump and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell.

Acting Up for Animals

Vegan since 1995, Rose and her co-activist husband have long taken part in what she calls "more creative, less expected, vegan activism." For instance, on World Vegetarian Day, you might find them dressed in costumes, handing out vegan recipes and veggie burger coupons.

"We don't want our activism to be about holding a sign with a bloody image on it," she says. "We always try to put a positive spin on our outreach."

Wicca, Rose's chosen path, emphasizes the interconnection between humans, the earth and animals—in contrast, she says, to the human-centric and patriarchal Judeo-Christian approach. For Rose, who founded Vegan Street Media, her activism to reduce animal suffering in the meat and dairy industries by bringing more people to the vegan lifestyle is a natural extension of both her feminism and her spirituality. "If we are elemental beings of this planet," she says, "then we have to understand that our role in protecting it, and all the beings we share the Earth with, is sacred."

Witches and Weed

Tiffany Watkins was called to activism while in college during the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Wanting to help her own LGBTQ+ community, she began by handing out pamphlets and condoms outside of clubs in the 1990s. By that time, she had already been introduced to the healing properties of cannabis and knew that the plant could offer some relief for those suffering from HIV and AIDS.

"When I saw people in my community being jailed for using a plant that really helped them, the fight just brewed within me," Watkins says. She's been involved in cannabis activism for the last 25 years and is now the editor and publisher of Vanguard Media Online, which focuses on women of color in the industry.

Bringing her spirituality, which is rooted in the pagan notion of honoring the sacred feminine, to the table as an activist has enabled Watkins to call upon her intuition in the kinds of tense situations that come up in the nascent weed industry. "My spiritual practice allows me to be calm enough in my essence and to project that calm out. [After hearing me speak], I've had folks comment on how calm they felt, and how they were able to hear folks out who maybe didn't agree with them for the first time."

But being a witch isn't something that Watkins' Black American community necessarily embraces, she says. To compound that, existing witch communities aren't always welcoming. Watkins mostly practices as a solitary witch, but has been part of groups and covens where, taking part in large rituals, she's been one of only a few people of color. "And there are some," she says, "who don't want me there." The irony of being marginalized within an already marginalized community isn't lost on Watkins. "When it comes to inclusion," she says, "I would say that this community has as much strife—and as much to learn—as any other." But she's doing her part to help the process.

> **"I ALWAYS WANTED TO BE A VOICE FOR PEOPLE WHO COULDN'T BE A VOICE FOR THEMSELVES."**
>
> *Activist Tiffany Watkins*

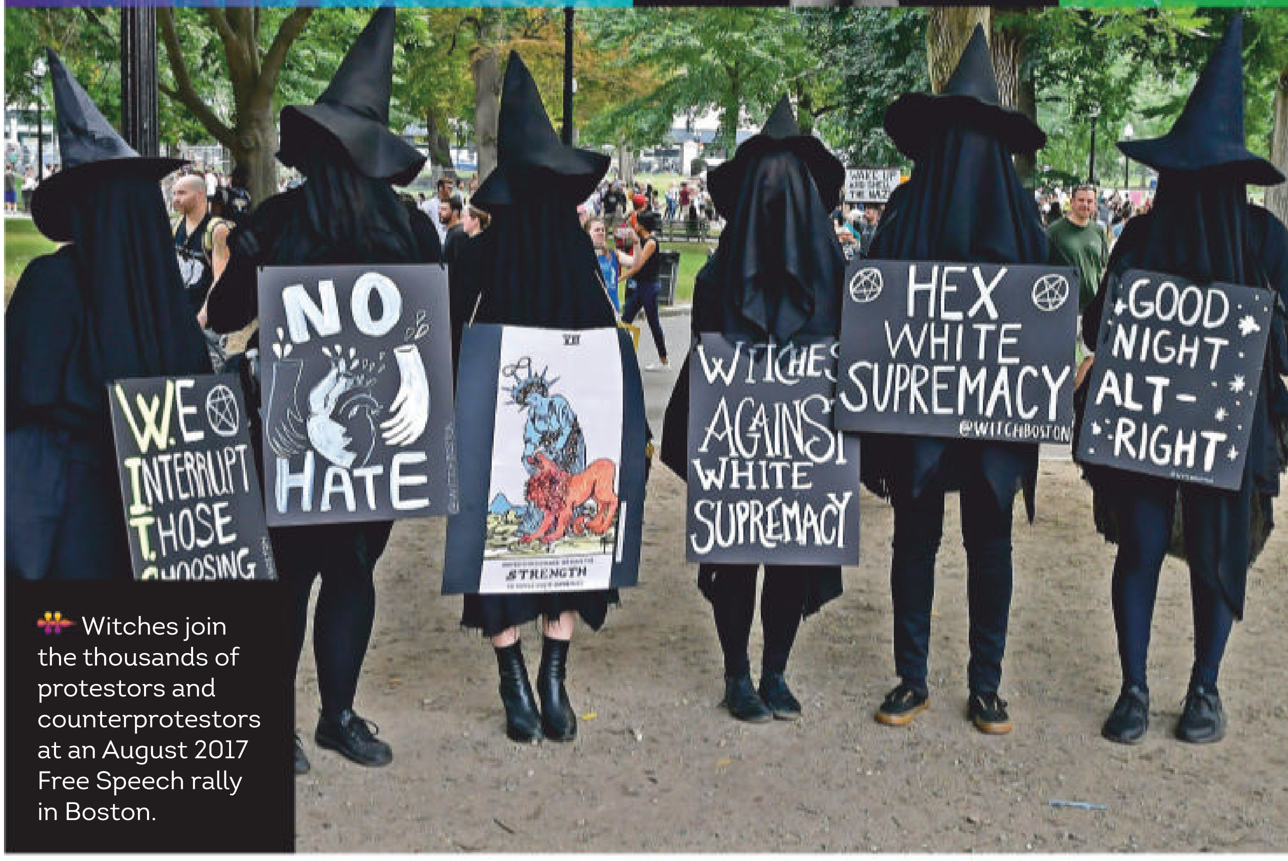
Get Out of the Broom Closet

Weaving your witch identity with that of your activist one can be done day to day in small but important ways. Some recommend morning rituals like yoga, a walk in nature or a blend of health-promoting herbs to help you cultivate a centered state to sustain your passion for change.

It's important to show up for your convictions in whatever way you can, says Rose, whether that's marching or protesting in person, attending virtual meetings, signing petitions, making phone calls or simply contacting your elected state and local representatives about issues that matter to you.

"There is power in putting yourself on the line for a cause," says Rose, who's twice been arrested for nonviolent protest. "But activism doesn't have to be about standing with a placard, or getting arrested. It *can* be those things, but integrating it into your life in ways that are sustainable and in ways that sometimes push your comfort zone—that's what we do."

TIFFANY WATKINS



Witches join the thousands of protestors and counterprotestors at an August 2017 Free Speech rally in Boston.

Let's Celebrate!

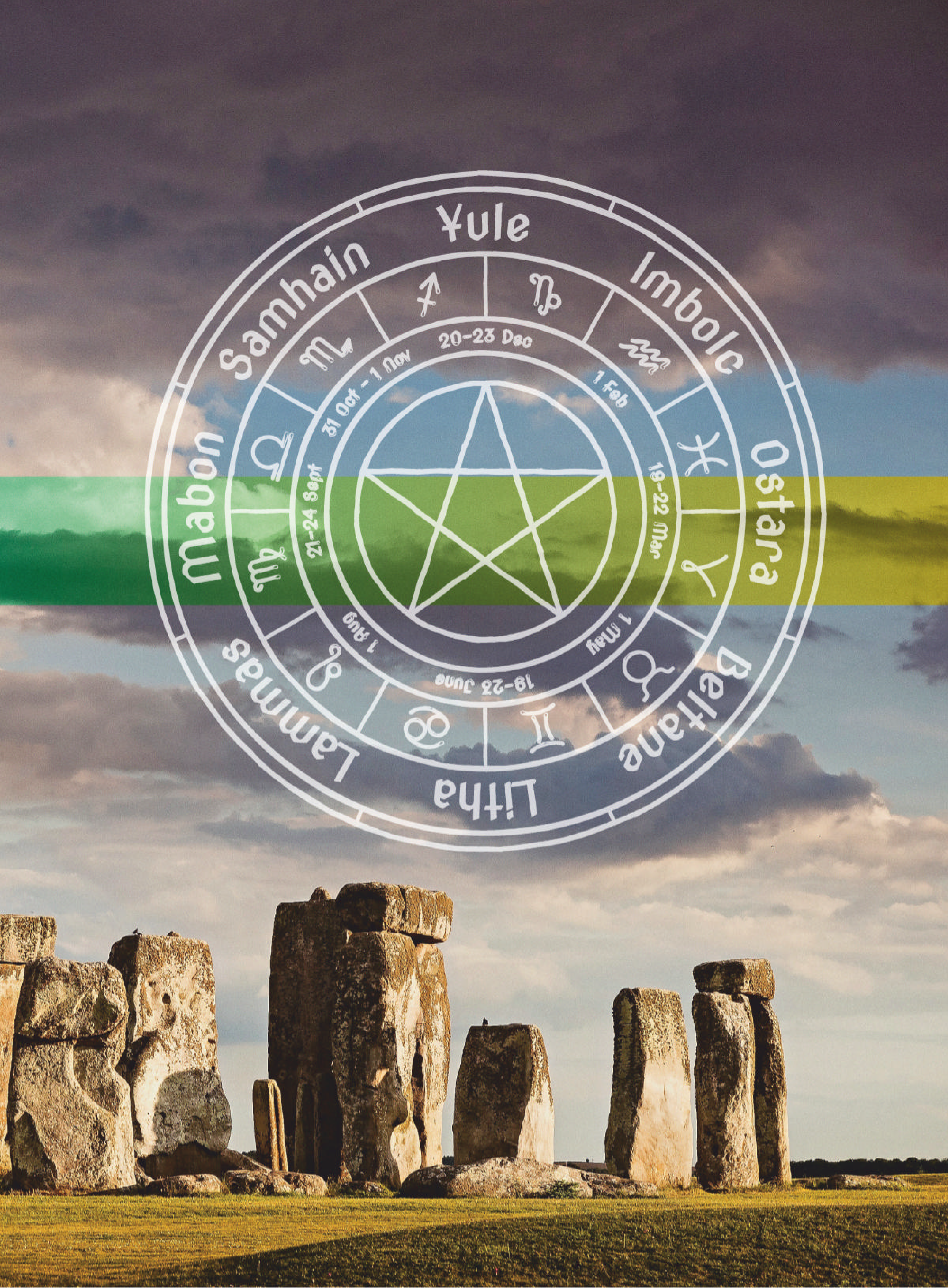
Discover the eight Sabbats of the Wheel of the Year.

BY DEBORAH BLAKE

There are many aspects of a witchcraft practice, including general magickal work, walking a spiritual path on a daily basis and, of course, following the lunar cycles, with a special emphasis on the full moon. But for many witches, there are eight other days of the year that stand out from all the rest.

These days are the Sabbats (as opposed to the full moons, which are known as esbats), and collectively they make up the Wheel of the Year. There are two solstices (winter and summer), two equinoxes (spring and fall) and the four quarter-cross days that fall between them. These Sabbats are celebrated in different ways around the world. Several are the basis for more familiar Christian or secular holidays, though many people who observe those holidays may be unaware of their pagan origins.

During the summer and winter solstices, England's Stonehenge becomes even more spectacular, as sunlight streams through the center of the monument.


Yule
20-23 Dec
♑
Imbolc
1 Feb
♒
♓
Ostara
19-22 Mar
♈
Beltane
1 May
♉
♊
Litha
19-23 June
♋
Lammas
1 Aug
♌
♍
Mabon
21-24 Sept
♎
Samhain
31 Oct - 1 Nov
♏
♐

The Sabbats follow the path of the sun and the ebb and flow of energy with the changing seasons; in some witchcraft traditions, they also tell the story of the god and goddess as they too change with the turning of the Wheel. The Sabbats are not only a great reason to get together with friends to celebrate (or observe on your own in a more personal way), but they also provide us with helpful reminders to connect with and go with the flow of the natural world, something that is easy to lose track of in our modern culture.

Imbolc

Imbolc is a quarter-cross holiday celebrated on Feb. 2 (yes, that's where Groundhog Day came from). It marks the first stirrings of spring far below the earth. Although in many parts of the country, winter still holds sway, Imbolc reminds us that spring is on the way, no matter how hard that might be to imagine when you look out your window. It's a good time to start making both magickal and practical plans for what you want to achieve in the year to come. Many witches use this holiday for cleansing and purification, to make way for what lies ahead, and to slowly start to shake off the quieter energy of winter. In Wiccan traditions, the goddess is changing from crone back to maiden, and the infant god is growing into a sturdy child.

Spring Equinox

Also known as Ostara, this Sabbat falls on or around March 21. (The equinoxes and solstices are based on the path of the sun, and therefore change by a day or two every year.) The name Ostara may come from the goddess Eostre, and many of the traditions of Easter can be traced back to these earlier pagan roots. For instance, eggs and rabbits are classic pagan symbols for fertility. Spring equinox celebrates new beginnings, growth and the return of warmth and vitality to the earth (and to us). If you made plans on Imbolc, now is the time to set them in motion. The goddess is in her form as maiden, and the god is youthful and full of energy. Ostara is one of only two days of the year when the darkness is equal to the light, so it's a good time to work on balance as well as starting new endeavors.

Revelers celebrate the winter solstice in Wiltshire, England (above). Women take part in a Maypole dance at Chalice Well in Somerset, also in southwestern England (right).

Beltane

Beltane falls on May 1 and is based on an ancient Celtic fire festival—you may know it as May Day. Some people begin their observances on the night before and refer to it as May Eve. This holiday celebrates love, fertility and passion, and in Wiccan lore it is when the goddess and god consummate their union. Many of the symbols of the Sabbat are overtly sexual (such as the Maypole dance, which involves the women digging a hole in the ground and the men cutting down a tree to make a pole to put into it, and then everyone dancing around it entwining ribbons that hang from the top; subtle we aren't). But it's also a holiday that celebrates love in all its forms, and many handfastings and weddings are held on this day. So light the bonfire, or a candle if you can't safely have a fire, and do a ritual dedicated to love in whichever way is most meaningful to you.

Summer Solstice

Also known as Litha (Midsummer), it falls on or around June 21 and, despite its name, is the official first day of summer. It's the longest day of the year and the shortest night, and therefore has the most energy of any of the Sabbats. It celebrates the sun, abundance and growth. If you can, this is definitely a day to observe outside, whether it's at the beach, a park or in your own backyard. In Wiccan traditions, the goddess is pregnant with the child of her consort, the horned god, and the entire Earth is bursting with vitality. This is a good time to check in on your goals for the year and give them a boost if they need one.

Lammas

In honor of Lugh, the Celtic god of light, Lammas is also called Lughnasadh. Falling on Aug. 1, it's a quarter-cross holiday, and the first of the three pagan harvest festivals. This holiday specifically celebrates the grain harvest, and the sun gods and agricultural goddesses (such as Demeter and Ceres) who help the crops to grow. If you are having a feast with friends, be sure to include a loaf of bread to share. Hopefully you are starting to reap the harvest of your own hard work, whether from an actual garden or whatever goals you have been focused on for the year.

Dancers take part in Edinburgh's Beltane Fire Festival on April 30, 2022. With over 250 volunteers and thousands of spectators, it's one of the largest celebrations of its kind.

Mabon

The autumnal equinox falls on or around Sept. 21 and is the other day of the year during which the light and the dark are equal. Just as on the spring equinox, this is a good time to work on balance in your life. The autumn equinox is the second harvest festival, and a time of joy and celebration, because it marks the end of the hard work that started with planting in spring. (Remember that most of the pagan holidays are based on earlier cultures where a successful harvest could mean the difference between life or death.) It's sometimes known as the witch's Thanksgiving and celebrated with a great feast of seasonal bounty. In some traditions, this is the time of year when the god sacrifices himself so that the land might be fertile, making the celebration bittersweet.

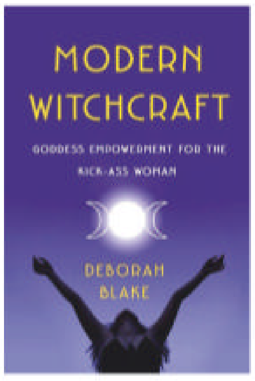
Samhain

This is the last of the quarter-cross holidays and falls on Oct. 31. As you might suspect, many of Halloween's origins are derived from this day. It's said that the veil between the worlds of the living and those who have gone beyond are thinnest on this day, so it's little wonder that Halloween features ghosts, spooky things and, of course, witches. In witchcraft, this is our most sacred holiday. We use it to communicate with our beloved dead and say goodbye to those we have lost in the past year. It's also a time for powerful rituals. Some consider it to be the witch's New Year, and we let go of the ending year's burdens and look forward to whatever lies ahead in the next turning of the Wheel. The goddess is alone in her guise as crone as we move into the darker part of the cycle, but we still celebrate this third harvest festival with corn, pumpkins and other seasonal food. It is the witchiest of all the Sabbats!

Yule

This is the winter solstice and it falls on or around Dec. 21. It's the origin of many of the traditions associated with Christmas, such as evergreen trees, holly and mistletoe, and even a powerful white-bearded figure known as the Holly King. Although it's the longest night of the year, the holiday celebrates the return of the light, since from this day forth there will be a little more sunlight every day. It's a time to gather with friends and family, light candles to illuminate the darkness, and rejoice in the bounty of life. The goddess gives birth to the infant god, and the Wheel of the Year turns again.

Deborah Blake is the author of myriad novels and guides about witchcraft, including Modern Witchcraft: Goddess Empowerment for the Kick-Ass Woman *and* The Everyday Witch's Coven.



PART 3

YOUR INNER WITCH

FROM CLEANSING TIPS TO SPELLWORK GUIDANCE TO TAROT CARD BASICS, EXPERTS OFFER ADVICE ON TAKING YOUR PRACTICE TO THE NEXT LEVEL. LEARN GREEN, ECO-FRIENDLY CRAFT OPTIONS, PLUS HOW TO CREATE A BOOK OF SHADOWS. THEN EXPLORE ALL THE PLEASURABLE SECRETS OF SEX MAGICK.

Manifest Your Best

Tips for getting your practice off the ground.

BY VIRGINIA CASTIGLIONE

Getting started with witchcraft is both exciting and fear-inducing—you don't want to offend spirits and deities, after all! And what if one of your spells goes so wrong you end up cursing yourself?

Don't worry. This guide is packed with valuable tips and info to help ease your fears and get you on the path to living your most magickal life!

Your space may include an altar for magickal work. Make sure to bring in only items with meaning to you and your practice–such as objects representing the elements or things handed down from your ancestors.

1

SETTING UP A SACRED SPACE

This is a designated area that's physically and spiritually clean. The energy there is harmonious. You can use it to do spellwork, but you can also read or relax there. Unlike a magick circle, you don't need anyone's permission to create a sacred space, and everyone can benefit from some harmonious energy, regardless of what they believe.

First, clean and declutter the area. This is one of the less glamorous parts of witchcraft, but it's also the most important. Dust and wash the floors. Make sure every object has a "home." You can choose to burn incense or herbs related to what you want to attract. When you smoke-cleanse, it's important to have doors and/or windows open so the smoke that carries negative energy can physically leave. Alternate methods of energetic cleansing include visualization, sound cleansing and water sprays.

Once you've adjusted the energies of your space, bless it. Direct both hands toward it and say out loud that you bless it in your name, the name of your ancestors or any deities you worship.

Cleansing & Purifying

It's important to cleanse and purify everything used for a magickal purpose. Otherwise, stagnant energy will carry over into your spells, manifestation rituals or worship.

There's a slight distinction between the acts of cleansing and purifying. Cleansing is the physical cleaning of an object. If the cup you use to offer moon water to the deity you worship has held that water for a little too long, it will not only hold onto the stagnant energy of the old water—it'll be full of bacteria. It's important to wash that cup just like you would any nonmagickal ones: with dish soap and warm water.

Some practitioners feel that sort of cleaning is enough, while others believe there's another step: purifying. This is especially helpful when an object is not physically dirty but feels stagnant or contaminated. Your obsidian pendulum may look just fine, but, when you touch it, you feel a slight pain on your fingers. In that case, you need to purify it.

Expose it to the smoke of cleansing herbs and/or resins such as rosemary, lavender or myrrh. Avoid white sage—it's been overharvested and is in danger of extinction—but other sage is fine.

Another way to purify your objects is to bury them in a ceramic or glass bowl of salt. However, salt can be corrosive for some materials. Raw rice is the perfect alternative. It won't damage anything. Don't eat the rice afterward, but use it cleanse more objects, then compost it.

Keep in mind, these methods act like spiritual bleach. If you have an object with positive energy associations (such as a family heirloom), you run the risk of losing or weakening those. Your best bet for these objects is to purify them by exposing them to sacred sounds, like that of a Tibetan bowl.

✣ If you have young kids, pets or asthmatic people in your home, do any fire purifying or candle magick when they're not present.

2

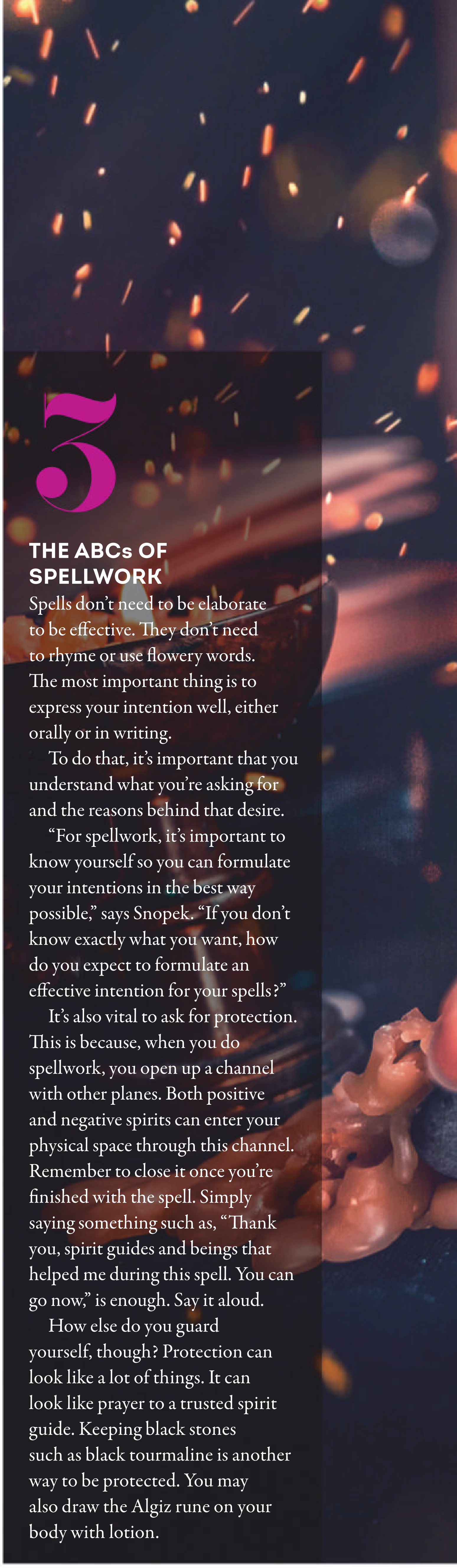
Starting on your path may stir up some unexpected feelings; make sure you take the time to explore and honor them.

REFRAME THE WAY YOU THINK ABOUT YOUR BODY

The body is the most important tool in a witch's tool kit. Your body can't be replaced. Self-care isn't just important for a witch, it's vital. I'm not talking about lavish or superficial spa days and bubble baths (though both of those can be nice!).

If you're serious about being a witch, taking vitamins, going to therapy, making and keeping doctors' appointments, eating mostly healthy things and making an extra effort to move your body in a way that gives you pleasure are all just as important as, say, protection or cleansing.

In addition to being an initiate witch, one member of my coven, Verene Snopek, is a licensed psychotherapist specializing in both cognitive and dialectical behavioral therapy. She shares the following wisdom about looking after your mental health as you begin your witchcraft journey. "It's important to do some inner work before you start doing energy work," she says. "If you didn't have the opportunity to do this inner work in the past, start some sort of therapy with a certified professional at the same time you start to take your first steps in witchcraft. Some things may come up while you start your practice (memories, for example) that were repressed. It's important to have qualified support available when this happens."



3

THE ABCs OF SPELLWORK

Spells don't need to be elaborate to be effective. They don't need to rhyme or use flowery words. The most important thing is to express your intention well, either orally or in writing.

To do that, it's important that you understand what you're asking for and the reasons behind that desire.

"For spellwork, it's important to know yourself so you can formulate your intentions in the best way possible," says Snopek. "If you don't know exactly what you want, how do you expect to formulate an effective intention for your spells?"

It's also vital to ask for protection. This is because, when you do spellwork, you open up a channel with other planes. Both positive and negative spirits can enter your physical space through this channel. Remember to close it once you're finished with the spell. Simply saying something such as, "Thank you, spirit guides and beings that helped me during this spell. You can go now," is enough. Say it aloud.

How else do you guard yourself, though? Protection can look like a lot of things. It can look like prayer to a trusted spirit guide. Keeping black stones such as black tourmaline is another way to be protected. You may also draw the Algiz rune on your body with lotion.

Runes can be used as a tool in spellwork and protection. They can also help determine if a spell is truly working.

4

MAGICKAL ASSISTS

There are different types of spells, and one isn't superior to another. And different situations call for different methods.

To tell whether a spell was effective, you can use a pendulum or other form of divination. If you think your spell could use a little extra oomph, here are some ways to up your magick game.

Candle Work

Candle work relies mainly on the energies of the elements fire and air, which keep the candle aflame.

These spells are a great way to observe the energy in action. You'll know it's working if the flame is strong. If it's weak or even if the candle goes out before it has to, you have a problem.

Once you're done with a spell, you can also practice scrying by observing the shape of the wax leftover. To do this kind of scrying, position the candle on a transparent glass plate. It will make the shape more visible and you can even flip it over for closer inspection.

The element of fire can be abrasive and rash. I wouldn't recommend candle spells for situations that require delicacy or diplomacy. Fire is neither. If you need a spell to be gradual or barely noticed, look at some other options.

Spell Jars

You can make a spell jar to bottle energy up, or you can use it to trap negative energies. If you need the energy of self-love, good luck or protection near you at a specific time, use this kind of spell to make an amulet with your desired purpose in mind. Keep it with you when you need it.

Don't make a spell jar when the energy needs to circulate freely for your desired result. If you wish to attract a lover, a job, an opportunity or money, don't trap this energy into a small container!

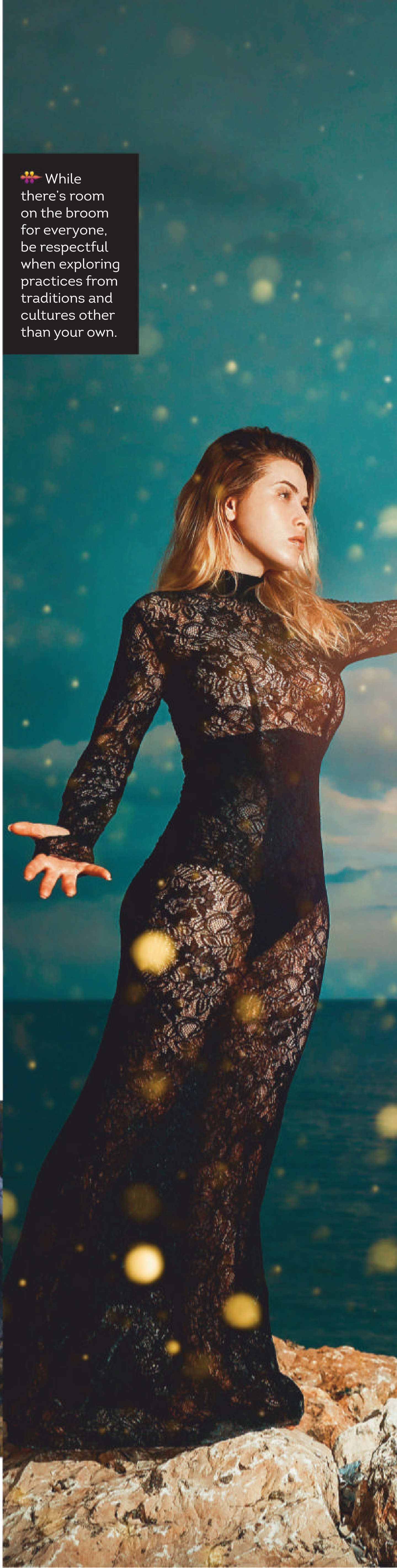
Spell Bowls

Unlike spell jars, bowls don't have a lid on them. The energy is open and free-flowing. These are great for wealth spells and those that involve attracting something—or someone.

This, however, also means that negative energy can enter the bowl and interfere with your spell. If you decide to set up a spell bowl, you'll have to keep the environment around it clean and purified for as long as the bowl needs to be there (that's usually until you start to see results).

Magic Spells
Vol. 13

Keep track of what types of spells work and which don't in your personal book of shadows.



While there's room on the broom for everyone, be respectful when exploring practices from traditions and cultures other than your own.

5 WHERE TO GO FROM HERE?

There have never been more resources available to nascent witches than there are today, and here are a few I recommend or have personally found helpful. But just because an advanced practitioner suggests a book or educational resource, it doesn't mean that it's the right tool for your practice.

Avery Martinez, an experienced nonbinary Latina witch in my coven, had some wisdom to share on this matter. "Witchcraft is a practice that has a disruptive origin of sorts. It has always been associated with femininity and finds its origins there," they say. "It's also important to bear in mind that it was eventually appropriated by the cis-heteropatriarchy and altered by this prominent worldview."

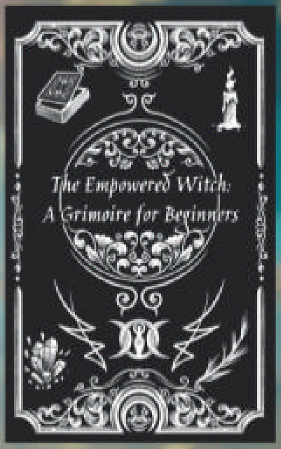
Martinez advises beginners to find resources that align with their views and what they hope to manifest. "Your practice should ideally be a reflection of who you are as a person," they say. "Work on having your own standards, ones that are cohesive with your comfort, security and the opportunities that are available to you."

If that doesn't look like what you see on TV shows or popular books, that's OK. "In witchcraft, there isn't one absolute truth," Martinez says. "There are different ways in which you can practice and different perspectives. Do it your way. You don't need a figure of authority."

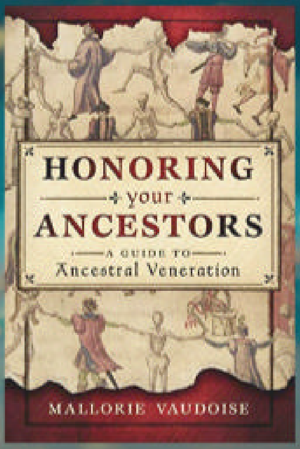
So let go of your fears of doing it right and start a practice that's perfect for you!

Córdoba, Argentina-based Virginia Castiglione is a certified gemologist, an Akashic records reader and a green witch. In the Scorpio season of 2021, she founded Aquamarine Content, a content marketing agency that is a lot like a coven!

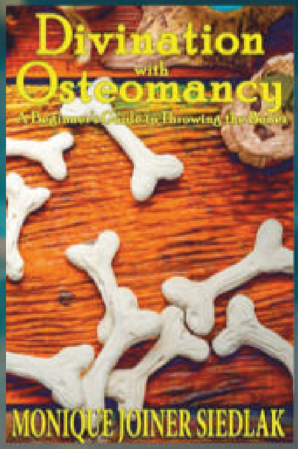
Book Recommendations for Beginners



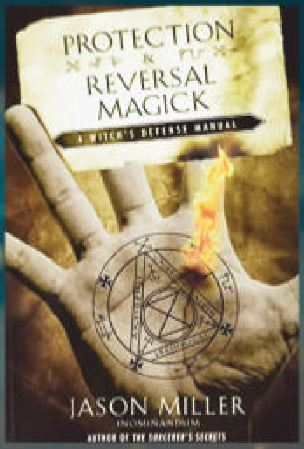
The Empowered Witch: A Grimoire for Beginners
Spell Cloth & Virginia Castiglione



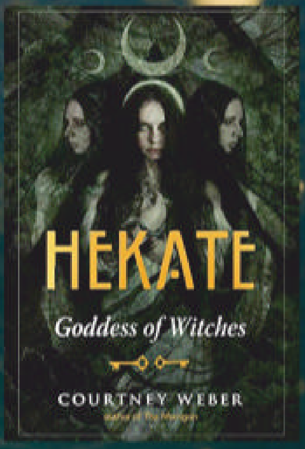
Honoring Your Ancestors: A Guide to Ancestral Veneration
Mallorie Vaudoise



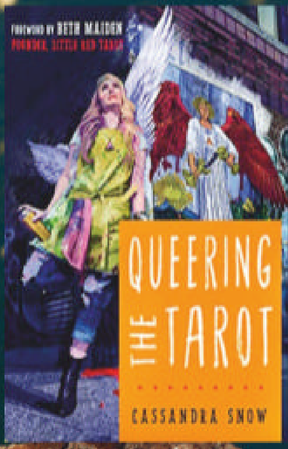
Divination with Osteomancy: A Beginner's Guide to Throwing the Bones
Monique Joiner Siedlak



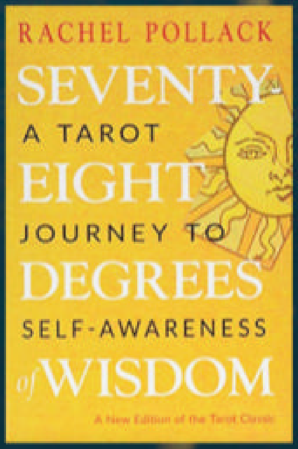
Protection & Reversal Magick: A Witch's Defense Manual
Jason Miller



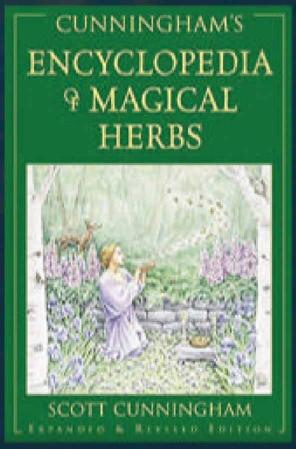
Hekate: Goddess of Witches
Courtney Weber



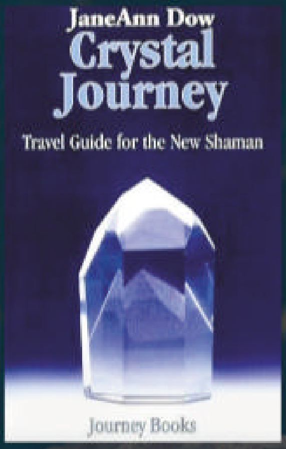
Queering the Tarot
Cassandra Snow



Seventy-Eight Degrees of Wisdom
Rachel Pollack



Cunningham's Encyclopedia of Magical Herbs
Scott Cunningham



Crystal Journey: Travel Guide for the New Shaman
JaneAnn Dow

Make sure you're clear and firm about what it is you want (or need!) to know. Ask specific questions to get the answers you deserve.

TAROT TUTORIAL

Ready to read the cards? Here's a beginner's guide. BY INBAAL

The tarot is a marvelous spiritual tool for followers of alternative paths...and it works for "normals," too!

I've been reading tarot since 1994, and teaching since 2000, and I can tell you with some confidence–anyone can do it. It just takes focus, practice and a lot of faith.

So if you're holding a tarot deck for the very first time, here's how to start that journey:

1 Shuffle

Giving the deck a good shuffle "connects" your own personal energies with those of the cards.

The shuffling isn't a random act of mixing the 78 tarot cards' order. If that were the case, we wouldn't be seeing the same cards come up repeatedly when we ask the same question. Rather, shuffling gives you the mental space to think your thoughts and ruminate over your life and circumstances. It also gives your deck a chance to get to know you so when the answers start to appear, they're clear, direct and relevant.

2 Decide on Your Question

I always say, "Vague questions get vague answers," so be direct. Ask exactly what you want to know. Now is not the time to be shy.

If you want to know whether someone will contact you, don't ask whether they're thinking of you–ask if they're going to get in touch. Ask if you're going to pass the exam. Ask what you need to say in the interview in order to be offered the job. Ask about if you should move to Australia.

Your tarot will answer the question you ask.

3 Fan the Cards Facedown and Pull One Out

You can spread the cards over anything–a table, velvet cloth, even a clean floor. As much as possible, try to do it so that each card back is visible, even if only a bit.

When you pick a card to answer your question, hover your hand over all the cards and see which one you feel drawn to. You might feel a warmth or a tingling when your hand is near the right card. You might visually see one of the cards appear darker, shinier or one might even seem to be moving. Take your time, but don't overthink it. With the question in your mind, just slide the card out of the deck, and turn it over to look at it.

4 Examine the Image on the Face

Look at the colors and images of the card in front of you. Does it appear positive and reassuring to you, or is the artwork foreboding and uneasy? This initial impression will give you a "yes" or "no" answer to your question. Don't second-guess: Your impression is correct.

Then get into the specific card meaning by its elemental suit.

Pentacles are the earth element. They represent work and financial situations, and sometimes health matters and the physical body.

Cups are the water element. Those are cards of romance, love and the home. Emotional instability appears on them, too.

Swords are the air element. Intellectual pursuits, studies and writing will show up in swords cards, and this is where we'll also see mental disorders.

Wands are the fire element–fire of creation, of creativity, passion and rage. If it bubbles in your belly, it's a wand card.

The Major Arcana cards signify big life changes, situations and answers that will leave an impression. The smaller numbers are a little more practical–4 is the emperor, your boss or your dad. The higher numbers are more conceptual–17 is the star, hopes and wishes coming true.

5 Write It Down

Take note of your question, your card and what you believe the answer to be.

Over time, you'll see how you become more accurate, and find even more meaning.

Inbaal has been a tarot reader and Wiccan for 20 years. She's written horoscopes for Elle, *appeared on TV and radio shows, and teaches tarot at inbaal.com.*

Woods, lakes and forests are sacred spaces for many practitioners of green witchcraft.

Natural Wonders

Green witches forge an eco-friendly path that utilizes and honors the elements.

BY DANIELLE SIMONE BRAND

The roots of green witchcraft can be literal roots. It's a path that follows the simple philosophy of living in harmony with nature. It's also a lifestyle with expressions as diverse as the people who practice it.

"Green witchcraft is a form of magick that entails communicating with the earth, plants, flowers, crystals—working with a lot of earth elements to facilitate healing," says Jenna Volpe, RDN, an Austin, Texas-based holistic dietitian, energy healer and owner of Whole-istic Living. She finds that her clinical practice of helping clients cultivate wellness by using food, herbs and other holistic tools mirrors the healing work long associated with witches.

Sometimes green witches cast spells and perform rituals to directly benefit an animal or a natural feature, such as a lake or river. Other times, the focus is on healing—for one's self or someone else. As with many paths, there are oodles of resources and no fixed canon or required rituals. Green witches may practice solo, one-on-one or as part of a coven.

Love Your Mother

While the expressions of green witchcraft may vary, the main underlying themes center around nurturing a healthy relationship between people, the earth and all living things.

"The more you put into your relationship with the earth, the more you get out of it," writes Paige Vanderbeck in *Green Witchcraft: A Practical Guide to Discovering the Magic of Plants, Herbs, Crystals, and Beyond*. "By studying and working with natural elements like plants, weather, crystals, and the cosmos, witches become in tune with the cycles of growth, evolution, harmony, life and death."

Most green witches will tell you that the path can be taken on by anyone, regardless of religion or spiritual beliefs (or lack thereof). Think of it more like a nature-centered, but eclectic, practice with spiritual and healing elements that can either dovetail with another path or religion, or stand fully on its own.

"I think it's a broad category," says Volpe, who finds it encompasses a wide variety of ways that "people can either manifest or heal through connecting and working with nature."

Some green witches come to the practice through environmental activism, while for others, the spiritual connection to nature precedes the pursuit of a greener lifestyle. But whichever way you slice it, green witchcraft naturally translates into a reflection on the consequences of one's individual choices on the plants, animals, air, water and earth elements that make frequent appearances in the practice. And because compassion toward living things is baked into the ethos, most green witches choose to adjust their lifestyles to reflect a more thoughtful relationship to the natural world around them.

Green witches take time to stop and practice self-care.

“There’s no way not to combine green witchcraft and environmentalism,” says Shannon Hannaway, a Seattle-based death doula and cancer care coordinator who has been on the path in some way or another since childhood. “When you start working with living things all around you all the time—whether it’s the spirit of a living thing or a living thing itself—you can’t help but think about the impact you’re making on the natural world and how you want to be a steward of all of it.”

That environmentalism may entail signing online petitions to save wild spaces, joining in beach or park cleanups, supporting conservationist organizations, recycling and composting, walking and taking public transportation instead of driving a car, making thoughtful food and consumer choices, or publicly demonstrating in support of environmental protections and rights for Indigenous peoples.

“IF ALL YOU HAVE IS A GAS STATION PACKET OF CHAMOMILE, WELL, THEN THAT’S A PLACE TO START.”

Death doula Shannon Hannaway

Finding ethical—and ideally local—sources of the herbs, crystals and other ritual materials is another avenue for green witches to consider. For instance, white sage has long been a popular material used for smudging or clearing out energy in preparation for a ritual, but its current endangered status means that ethically-minded practitioners will turn to a more common and/or local alternative, such as juniper sprigs, which can serve the same purpose.

Plant Your Seeds

Though it may seem intimidating, you don’t need to live in the country, grow a bazillion plants and know everything about their medicinal properties to be a green witch. In fact, you don’t even have to call yourself a green witch at all.

Start small. Volpe suggests taking a few minutes when you can for a practice called “earthing”—or walking barefoot on grass, dirt or sand to connect with nature on a physical and energetic level. She also incorporates rituals to honor the full and new moons—which might include setting crystals out to recharge in the moonlight and creating a list of intentions.

“My practice falls into green witchcraft as the protagonists of most of my spells are crystals and/or herbs,” jokes Virginia Castiglione, the Córdoba, Argentina-based founder of an alternative healing marketing firm called Aquamarine Content. She suggests setting a simple altar with a candle and herbs that support your specific purpose or intention (see sidebar). From there, you can personalize your altar with found or foraged items from the natural world—such as pine cones, willow bark or a feather—or with photographs of a passed loved one, ancestor or beloved animal.

Use local plants and crystals as much as you can in your practice; not only is buying local goods helpful for the economy in your area, it also benefits the environment by reducing the number of miles, and the amount of gas expended, in sourcing the materials. According to Castiglione, regional herbs and crystals will also hold the most potent energy for your rituals.

Practitioners generally emphasize the importance of starting where you are, doing what you can and letting go of the need for perfection.

"Working with what you have is the origin of witchcraft in general," says Hannaway. "So, whatever you can make work—that's valuable and enough." She suggests you not be fixated on obtaining all-organic ingredients for your rituals or living a fault-free, environmentally conscious lifestyle, because that kind of all-or-nothing thinking can actually disempower you. Plants and healing herbs are, in fact, all around us.

"There are infinite ways to embody green witchcraft," explains Volpe, who adds, "Anybody can do it."

THERE'S A PLANT FOR THAT

For many practitioners, working with herbs is an important component of the craft. Here are some of the basics.

CHAMOMILE

For an all-natural tension tamer, try sipping chamomile tea as you prepare for a ritual. Described by green witch Shannon Hannaway as a "soft and inviting" herb, chamomile flowers can also be sprinkled around an altar to help draw in the energy of good luck and protection.

GINGER

Reach for this versatile root when seeking purification or to boost the power of a spell. Medicinally, ginger can be taken to enhance immunity to colds and flus, and to soothe an upset stomach. If you can't find or afford ginger root, powdered ginger also works.

JUNIPER BUNDLES

Try smudging, or clearing the energy of a room or person, by burning a bundle of juniper sprigs as an alternative to the endangered white sage.

LAVENDER

Many a witch taps into lavender's legendary aroma and medicinal properties to evoke calm energy and protection, as well as to aid in divination.

MINT OR PEPPERMINT

Place mint leaves on your altar to attract beneficial energy and spirits, and for a boost to your finances. Inhale the scent of mint to help energize and sharpen your mind, or drink mint tea to aid in digestion.

ROSE

Choose rose petals or rose oil for heart opening as well as for affirming emotional self-protection and healthy boundaries for those in caregiving roles. Crushed rose petals can be sprinkled on your altar, added to a sachet of herbs or mixed with your favorite drink.

ROSEMARY

Call upon rosemary to help with remembering passed loved ones and to lighten your spirit in matters concerning the end of life. It can also assist with protection and banishment of negativity.

Herbal medications may be trendy, but plants have been used for healing for thousands of years.

Poppets, runes and crystals are some of a witch's greatest tools.

Page *Perfect*

An insider's guide to creating and keeping your own book of shadows.

BY DEBORAH BLAKE

Imbolc · Ostara
Beltane
Litha
Lammas

One of the great things about being a modern witch is that you can practice the craft with nothing more than your heart, your intellect and your spirit. That being said, there are a lot of wonderful tools you can use to make your practice more powerful, or easier, or even just more fun. Including one you might not consider a "tool" at all.

When most people think of magickal paraphernalia, the first things that come to mind are probably traditional items such as athames, brooms and cauldrons, and maybe wands and crystals. All of these are fabulous, and they're often both functional and beautiful. But the witch's most powerful tool of all is knowledge, which makes a book of shadows an invaluable aid to a witchcraft practice.

A book of shadows can be used to preserve the information you gain over the years, through your own experimentation, what you've learned from others, or both. It can hold thoughts, dreams and goals, and will grow and change with you over the course of time. So what exactly is a book of shadows?

The modern term was probably invented by Gerald Gardner in the 1940s, but there have been books of magick in many lands since the beginning of the written word. The most commonly known is the grimoire, which is a European term, but there were famous magickal tomes in the Library of Alexandria, as well as in Greek, Roman and ancient Jewish cultures.

A book of shadows is probably the most personal tool a witch can own, and it can be altered and adapted to suit the needs of each individual. As with much of witchcraft, there is no one right way to use one; simply figure out what works best for you. For instance, it's traditional for a book of shadows to be handwritten, because it's thought that there is power in writing out the words of spells and ingredients. That's true, of course, but if you (like me) have terrible handwriting, or simply lack the time to write everything out as neatly as you would like, it's perfectly fine to print things out and tape or glue them into your book.

Have a favorite spell? Be sure to preserve it in writing so you can refer back to it as needed.

What Goes Inside?

So what should you put into your book of shadows? This too will vary from witch to witch. It all depends on your needs and desires. Some people like to reserve their book for writing down the spells and rituals they have performed. If you're working with a coven, and the book is shared by all the members, that's probably the easiest approach.

Other witches choose to create a book of shadows that's the repository of all their accumulated magickal knowledge, so whatever they have learned can be found in one place. Traditional grimoires often contained everything from lists of herbs and their properties to recipes for using them, plus drawings of the plants so they could be recognized for future use. Magickal knowledge was sometimes passed down within families or to newer practitioners in this way.

> **"ANYTHING THAT IS USEFUL…IS WORTH HAVING; IF IT'S BEAUTIFUL, THAT'S A BONUS."**
>
> *Author Deborah Blake*

Depending on your own practice, you may wish to include info about herbs, crystals, candle magick and craft projects (such as creating magickal oils, charm bags or poppets). You might include samples of your favorite invocations and quarter calls, correspondences you have found useful and, of course, spells and rituals you have performed or hope to perform in the future. Some witches also like to make notes about gods and goddesses with whom they feel a connection, the results of divination work such as tarot readings or rune stone pulls, or even dreams that seem important.

In fact, for some, a book of shadows may be as much a journal as an encyclopedia. It completely depends on your style and what you find the most useful. This is a good thing to keep in mind when you're starting out to create your own personal collection.

The type and form of the book you use will depend on what you intend to do with it. For instance, some people like to buy a blank journal and simply add to it as they go along. This works well for those who use a chronological approach (just entering things as you do them or think of them, day by day). It's simple and uncomplicated, and you can look back over time and see your progress, or where you were at a particular point in your life.

However, if you're someone who likes to keep things more organized, and plan to use your book of shadows as a place to store various types of information, you might want to make it easier to refer to specific sections as you need them in the future. In this case, you would either want to set aside portions of your blank journal for those topics (such as herbs and stones), or use a binder that allows you to add or move pages around as needed.

Either approach can be made more witchy by starting out with a plain store-bought notebook or binder, then decorating it with anything from dried flowers and herbs to magickal symbols.

A good book of shadows will bring positive memories back to life for its keeper.

Author Deborah Blake's book (left) is the latest in a long line of this witch's resources (below).

the
eclectic
witch's
BOOK of
SHADOWS
Witchy Wisdom
at your
Fingertips
DEBORAH BLAKE

Or you can go to a New Age or pagan store and find blank books that are already designed for this use. Choose the one that appeals to you the most.

Once you have your book, you can decide how you want to set it out and what you want to include. This may change over time, of course, and some witches have more than one, or one book of shadows from their early years of practice, and then additional ones from when they became more advanced. Some people consider these to be their private tools and never show them to anyone else, while others are happy to share the contents and their knowledge. This is a completely personal decision.

For the Less Crafty

If you don't feel like you've got the time and energy to create your own book, or if it's simply not the kind of thing you would do, there is an alternative. If you're part of a coven, you may have access to the group's book of shadows, if they have one. Or you can buy a ready-made book, like my own, *The Eclectic Witch's Book of Shadows: Witchy Wisdom at Your Fingertips*. My book is specifically designed for folks who don't want to start from scratch, but it includes lined, blank spaces to add your own information and experiences as you grow.

No matter what approach you take, there are a few specific things you can do to make your book of shadows your own and really imbue it with your personal energy. Start by writing your name inside. This probably seems obvious, but the very act of writing your name in the front, or "This book belongs to _____," shows you are claiming the magick within its pages as your own. If you have any particular symbols that you use for your work, you can add those too.

Feel free to draw or sketch on the pages. Traditional grimoires often had sketches of herbs or magickal workings (such as poppets), and sometimes even beautiful little paintings. If you are artistically inclined, you should definitely consider using colored pens or even watercolors to decorate your book. The art doesn't have to be perfect. Remember, this is for you, not for anyone else.

Last but not least, don't forget to bless and consecrate your book of shadows, just as you would do with any other magickal tool. After all, it contains knowledge and wisdom, and those are precious indeed.

GET YOUR Sex Magick On

Unlock your power—and your pleasure!—by connecting with the divine erotic.

BY GABRIELA HERSTIK

If you opt to bring in a romantic partner, make sure they've given their consent to any planned rituals.

Witchcraft has always been intimately tied to the body. To the wax and wane within the self as reflected by the moon. To the ways the body mirrors the fertility and fecundity of nature, the primal inspiration and source of power for the witch. In this same way, sexuality and the erotic are intimately connected to witchcraft, not only because sexuality has threatened established orders and modes of operating in the Western world, but also because sexual energy is one of the most potent forces in the universe that witches tap into through consciously working with it in their rituals and magick.

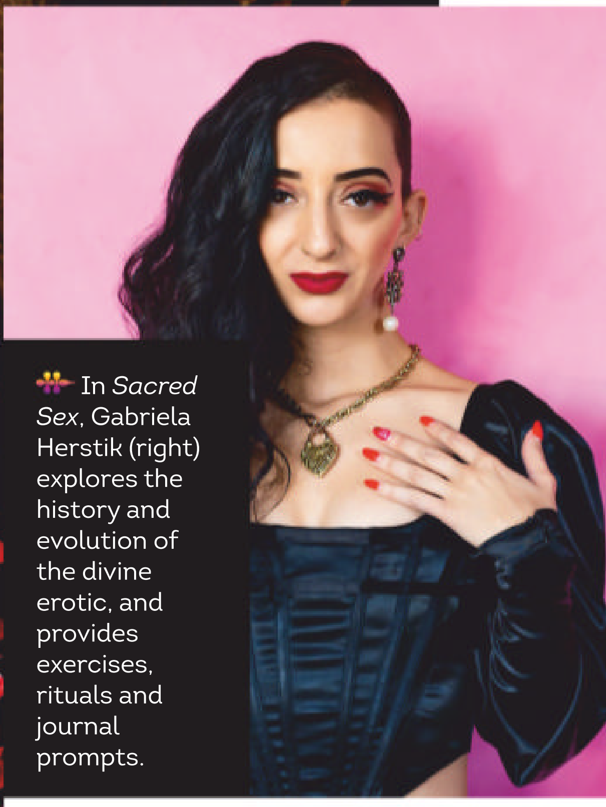
This is sex magick; the conscious use of the powers of the flesh through sexuality, raising and directing this current of energy for a desired outcome. Sex magick may have become more of a buzz term as of late, but the strength of this sort of magick has thankfully not been diluted.

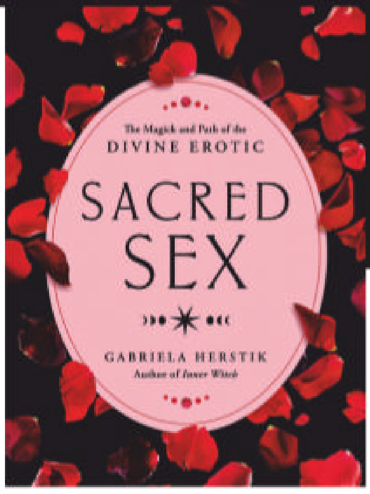
> **"SACRED SEXUALITY IS NOT SOMETHING THAT ONLY HAPPENS WHEN YOU'RE IN A RELATIONSHIP."**
> *Author Gabriela Herstik*

Sex magick is consciously working with ecstatic and orgasmic states to create change in the inner and outer realm, but it's also something more. Sex magick—and the path of the sex witch—are a method of recognizing, tapping into and owning your sexual power. It's a means of connecting to the divine erotic, the living current of sexual energy that makes up and sustains the whole world.

To practice sex magick means owning your desires, honoring your body, banishing shame around pleasure and doing this in a ritual or ceremonial context to transform yourself, your life and your surroundings. It's a way of embodying your fullest expression in a world that sells sex but denies anyone but cisgender and straight white men the opportunity to use their sexuality to their advantage.

No partner? No problem! Sex magick can be practiced solo, which may help a self-conscious witch really (touch and) get in touch with their power.



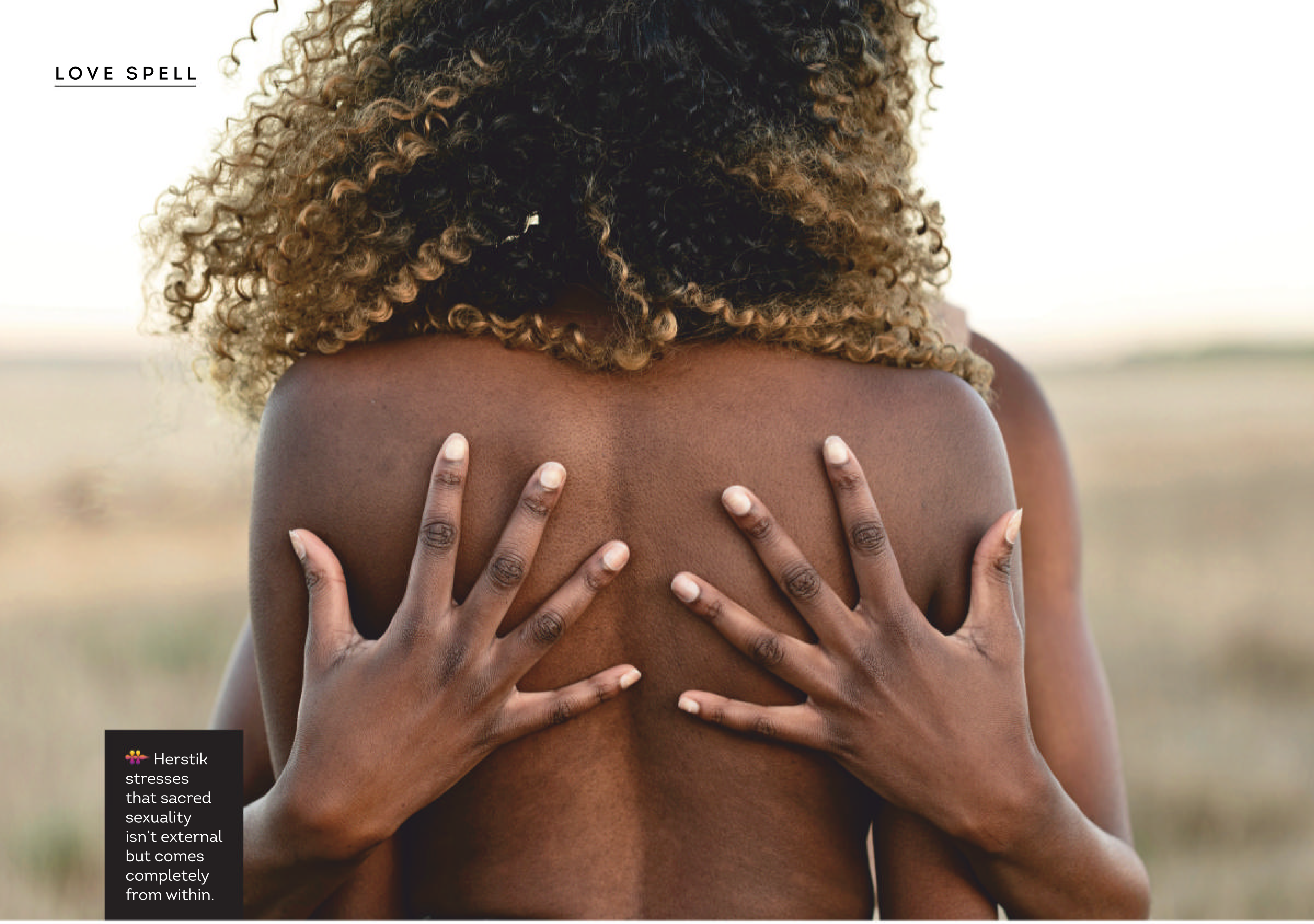


The Magick and Path of the
DIVINE EROTIC
SACRED
SEX
GABRIELA HERSTIK
Author of Inner Witch

In *Sacred Sex*, Gabriela Herstik (right) explores the history and evolution of the divine erotic, and provides exercises, rituals and journal prompts.

Though sex magick is a specifically Western current, its influences are many. There's tantra (brought over by those from Hindu and Buddhist traditions), which transformed into "neo-tantra," as well as the Western esoteric tradition. Sex magick is as much a practice as it is a path, and one that each witch will define for themselves.

Sex magick itself is the practice of raising sexual energy to charge or empower a spell, working to connect with the divine or to embody and embrace your sexuality in a new way. It can be done as a part of a practice with certain gods, as a part of the path of the goddess, as part of



Herstik stresses that sacred sexuality isn't external but comes completely from within.

a system of satanic witchcraft, ceremonial magick or eclectic witchcraft. Because sexual energy is the energy of creation, and because it leads to a peak state that mirrors raising energy and sending this through the cone of power, it can be adapted in numerous ways by any witch. They just need to be sure that any method chosen feels supportive and resonant to them. Here's a guide to getting started.

1 Set Your Intention

Before you get down and divinely dirty, it's important you know the why. You may practice sex magick as part of a devotional practice to yourself or a deity, or you may work with it to manifest something such as a new job or a new apartment. You may work with sex magick to charge a celebration during a Sabbat, such as the summer solstice or spring equinox. You may work with this to banish old beliefs around your desires or sexuality, or to heal your body or your heart. All that matters is that you decide on an intention that feels right for you, for your practice, for your path and for your heart.

You'll also want to plan the ritual at this stage. What correspondences will you be using? Will you need to perform this ritual on a certain day (such as Friday, Venus' day, for love?) or at a certain lunar phase (such as the new moon, to call something in)? How will sex magick be part of a larger ritual or working, and what supplies will you need for this? Taking the time to plan this at least a day or two ahead of the ritual itself will cause the least stress possible when it comes time to do the deed itself.

At this point, you'll also want to decide if you're practicing sex magick solo, or with a partner or partners.

2 Set Up the Space and Yourself

Once you know the reason you're practicing sex magick, and the way this fits into the larger context of your ritual, you'll want to gather your supplies and get yourself and your space set up. This means making sure that your altar is ready, any incense or candles are lit, your phone is set to silent, and any roommates, pets or kids you have know not to disturb you. If you'll be using sex toys, condoms or lubricant, now is also the time to gather these to have with you in your ritual space.

At this point, you may wish to adorn yourself in anything that helps you tap into your erotic energy; think lace, leather, lipstick, your favorite perfume, silk boxers, satin robes, layers of jewelry. Anything that makes you feel sexy, handsome or divinely erotic should be brought into the mix.

3 Ground, Center and Begin the Ritual

Once the space, your heart and body are set, ground and center yourself. Then, begin the ritual. I like to do this by pulling in white healing and purifying light from the heavens, moving this through the crown of my head and down my spine, where this transforms into roots that dig deep into the core of the

Everyone's path will be unique, just as what everyone finds pleasurable is unique. But deciding to make sex sacred is when transformation truly starts.

earth. These roots pull golden, grounding energy from the earth, up my spine and through my body. I visualize the energy from the heavens and the earth meeting at my heart and expanding from here into a circle of protection. This energy is meant to serve my highest good and it will penetrate only if it's aligned in 100% divine light. Perform whatever opening rituals are in your practice, such as walking a circle, calling in the elements and quarters, evoking or invoking a deity, etc.

4 Raise the Energy Through Action

Once it comes time to practice sex magick, you'll begin to masturbate or do the deed with your partner. You can either think of your intention the whole time you're doing this, or simply be present to the pleasure and sensations. If the latter, be sure to bring your intention to your mind before the moment of climax or orgasm. Either way, as your sexual energy starts to rise and you approach the moment of release, imagine your intention coursing like energy throughout your body. Next, as you progress beyond this heightened state (whether through orgasm or not), send this energy out through the crown of your head and into the cosmos.

If you're practicing sex magick with a partner and you don't orgasm at the same time, repeat the visualization so each person holds the intention in their mind's eye as they move through sending the energy through the body and out the crown of the head. During the afterglow, visualize your intention coming to life. Feel it in your body and what it would be like to live as this new expression of yourself, or in this new expression of your life. Stay with this as long as you need.

5 Close the Ritual, Ground and Center

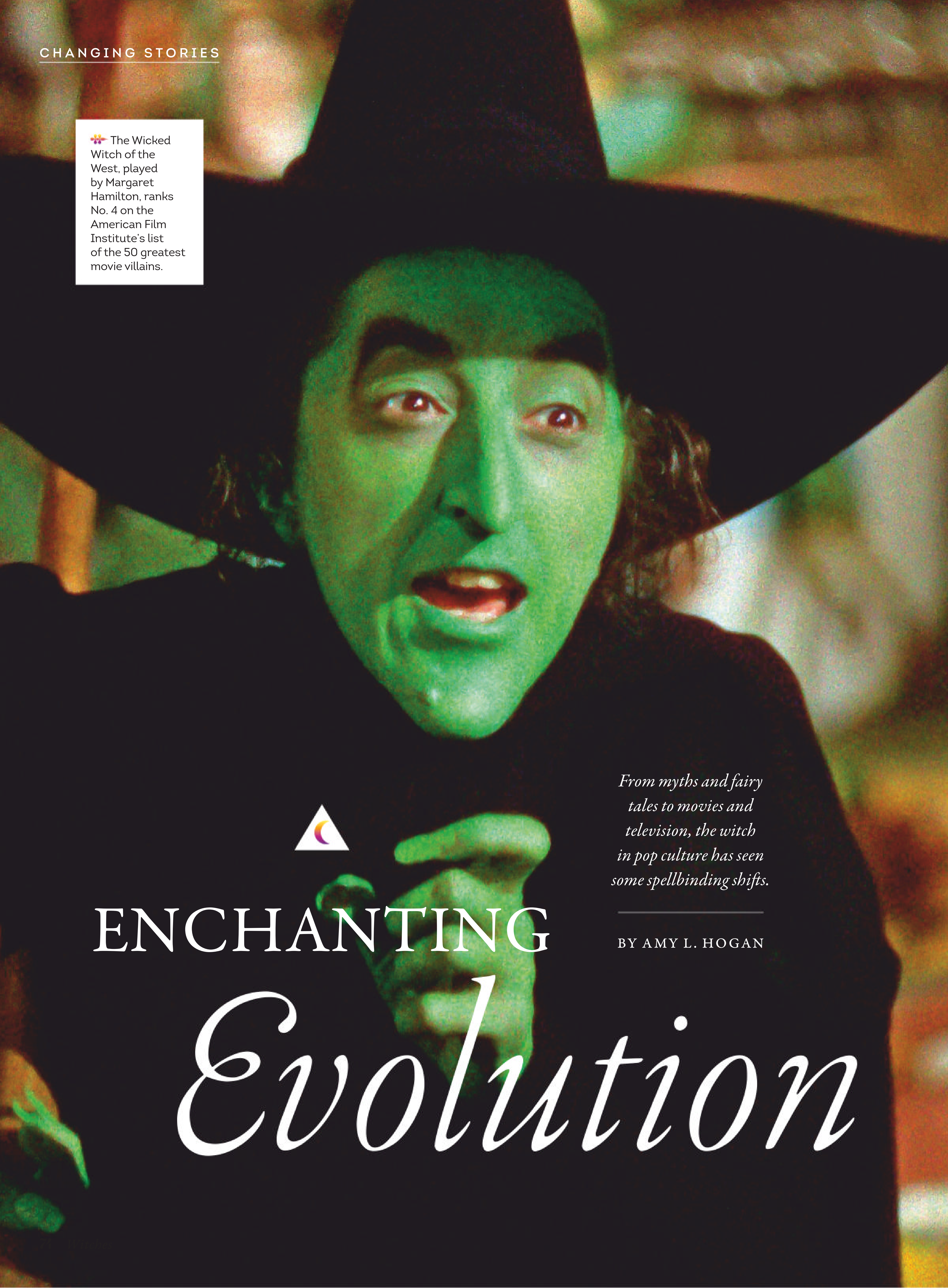
After you finish the ritual you're performing, you want to make sure you ground and center once again. You can visualize the energy from the earth moving back to its respective sphere, and the roots from your spine dissolving into golden light. Then visualize the energy from the heavens moving back to the celestial sphere. Next, feel the sphere of protection from your heart shrinking and shrinking as it moves back into your chest and dissolves into pure light. Perform whatever closing rituals align with how you opened; close the circle, dismiss the elements and quarters, dismiss any deities evoked or invoked, etc. Then write down your experience in your grimoire, eat delicious food, drink some water and enjoy knowing that you're officially a sex witch, baby!

Gabriela Herstik is an LA-based practitioner of erotic witchcraft and the author of multiple books on the craft, including Sacred Sex *and* Inner Witch. *Visit gabrielaherstik.com for more information, and follow her on Instagram, Twitter and Patreon @gabyherstik.*

PART 4

IN POPULAR CULTURE

DISCOVER THE ARCHETYPE'S EVOLUTION FROM ANCIENT MYTHS TO WANDA MAXIMOFF. READ FIRSTHAND WHAT IT'S LIKE TO PLAY A WITCH FROM CARICE VAN HOUTEN, LOTTE VERBEEK AND AMBER BENSON. GET THE STORY ON BESTSELLING AUTHOR LANA HARPER. PLUS, SHOP A MAGICKAL MARKET!



The Wicked Witch of the West, played by Margaret Hamilton, ranks No. 4 on the American Film Institute's list of the 50 greatest movie villains.

ENCHANTING *Evolution*

From myths and fairy tales to movies and television, the witch in pop culture has seen some spellbinding shifts.

BY AMY L. HOGAN

Almost every culture throughout history has had some concept of the witch in its shared stories. Often perceived as a pariah, it hasn't always been an easy yellow-brick road to social acceptance for these sorceresses. But whether we love 'em or hate 'em, we remain fascinated by these mysterious, powerful figures.

Folklore & Legends

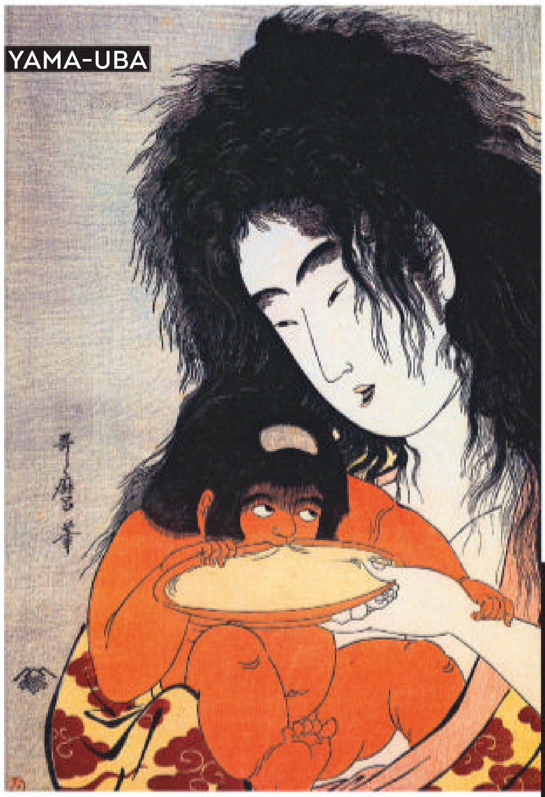
Homer is credited with creating one of literature's first witches—the beautiful enchantress Circe in *The Odyssey* (725-675 B.C.). Not one to be messed with, Circe turns much of Odysseus' crew into swine (she received a feminist update in her 2018 namesake novel by Madeline Miller). Meanwhile, her niece Medea got her spell on in helping Jason and the Argonauts (with a truly unhappy ending) in her namesake play by Euripides in 431 B.C.

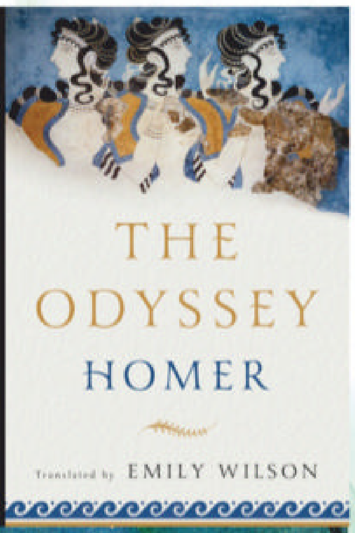
The witch in the poem "The Life of Merlin," written in Latin by the Norman-Welsh author Geoffrey of Monmouth around 1150, is another lustful lady looking for redemption and revenge. Gwenddydd, the wife of Rhydderch, seeks justice against her brother Merlin after he accuses her of lying outdoors with her lover. Monmouth's poem heavily influenced the medieval Arthurian romances that followed.

Independent women who lived outside of the norm—no husband or children—have been baffling and terrifying the patriarchy from the start, which could account for the witchy women-in-the-woods trope that's historically haunted sorceress stories.

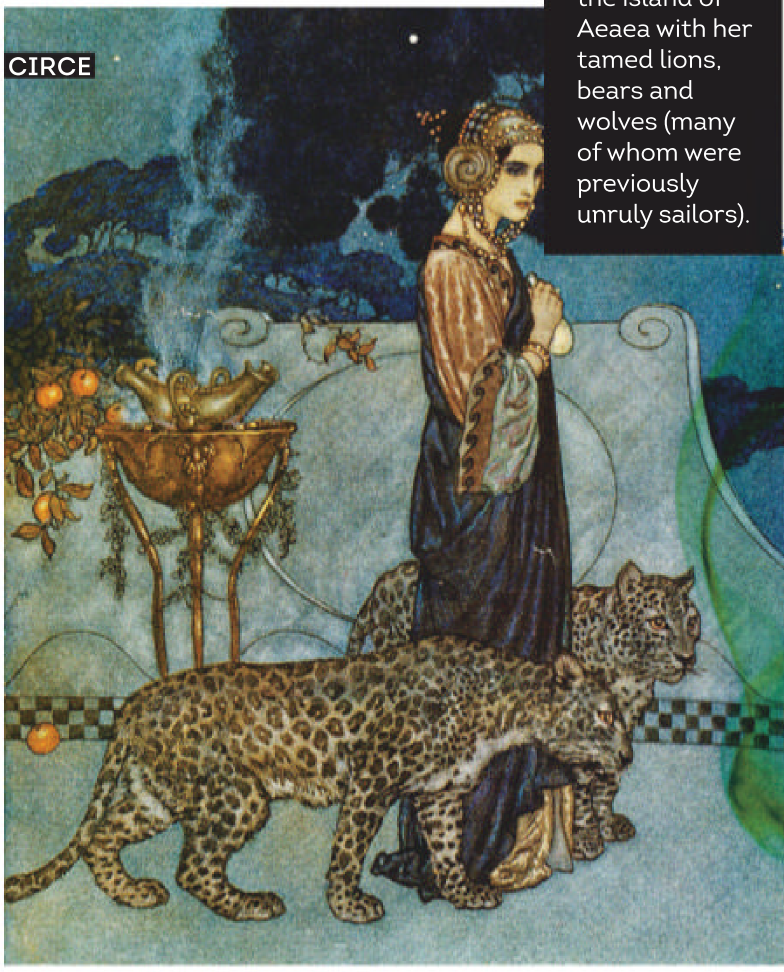
Yama-Uba first appeared in Japanese folklore dating back to the Muromachi Period (1336-1573). Often described as a hideous hag with cannibalistic tendencies, she attacks travelers and merchants passing through the wooded mountain region she inhabits. "Legend says she catches little children and nurses them for a while, then devours them," according to the writings of Lafcadio Hearn. There are various versions of Yama-Uba's origin story, including that there are multiples of this monster in the Japanese mountains, and they're born when young women accused of wicked deeds flee to the woods. They live in huts near the road to attract weary travelers seeking shelter. According to yokai.com, "Late at night, when their guests are fast asleep, Yama-Uba transforms into their true shape—an ugly, old, demonic witch." For generations, it's been a cautionary tale for disobedient children.

Back in Europe, Thomas Malory wrote of the witch Hellawes in his Arthurian legend chronicle, *Le Morte D'Arthur* (1485). After the knight Meliot killed her husband, Hellawes cursed him. And of course she had an unrequited, obsessive love of Sir Lancelot. Escaping the clutches of an evil seductress was just a job hazard for many of the period's heroes.


YAMA-UBA

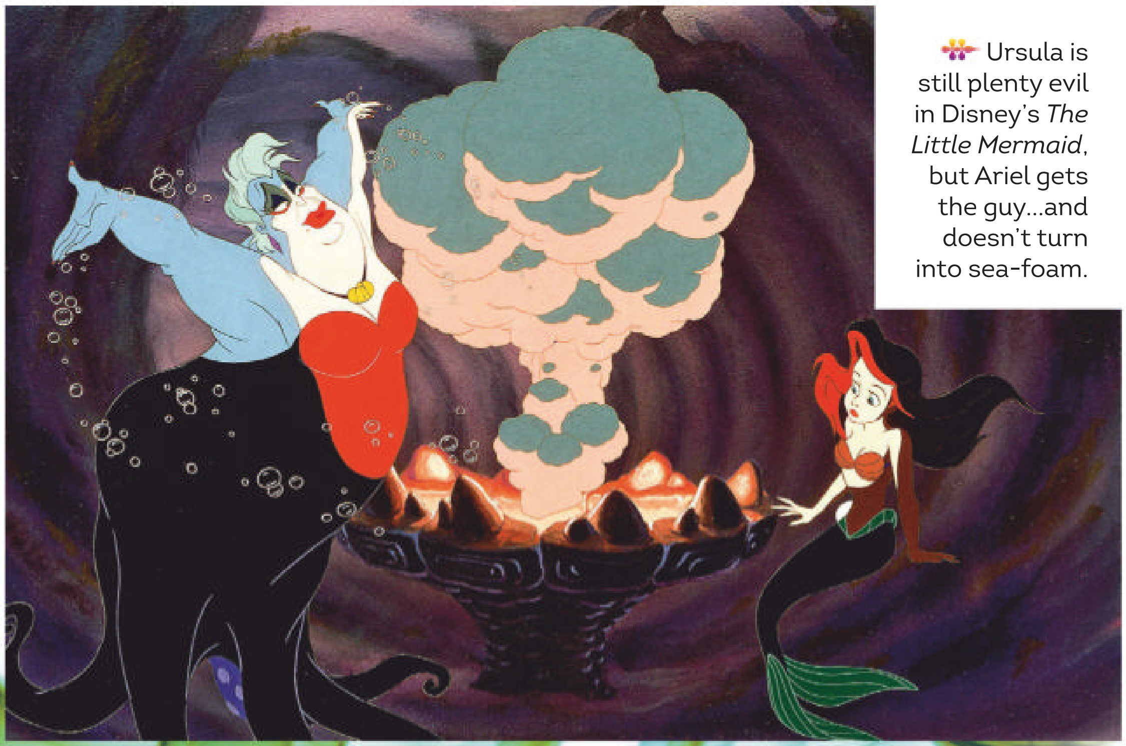


The Odyssey's Circe is the ultimate independent woman, living alone on the island of Aeaea with her tamed lions, bears and wolves (many of whom were previously unruly sailors).


CIRCE

During the 18th century, the Slavic witch Baba Yaga first appeared in Russian folklore. She's got a lot in common with Yama-Uba: Depending on the tale, she either imprisons and eats or occasionally helps those she encounters. She resides in a magickal hut, held up by chicken legs, deep in the forest. In the tale "Magic Swan-Geese," children are her preferred victims. Still, some celebrate Baba Yaga as the embodiment of female independence and empowerment.

In her own twisted way, Baba Yaga helps the young heroine in folklorist Alexander Afanasyev's tale "Vasilisa the Beautiful." According to an excerpt, "Young Vasilisa is forced to bring light back to her home, and is told to get some from Baba Yaga by her evil stepmother and stepsisters.... After pleasing the witch, Vasilisa is able to bring back a human skull with gleaming eyes and...light from the skull's eyes burns her stepmother and stepsisters to ashes." She's a badass, that Baba Yaga.

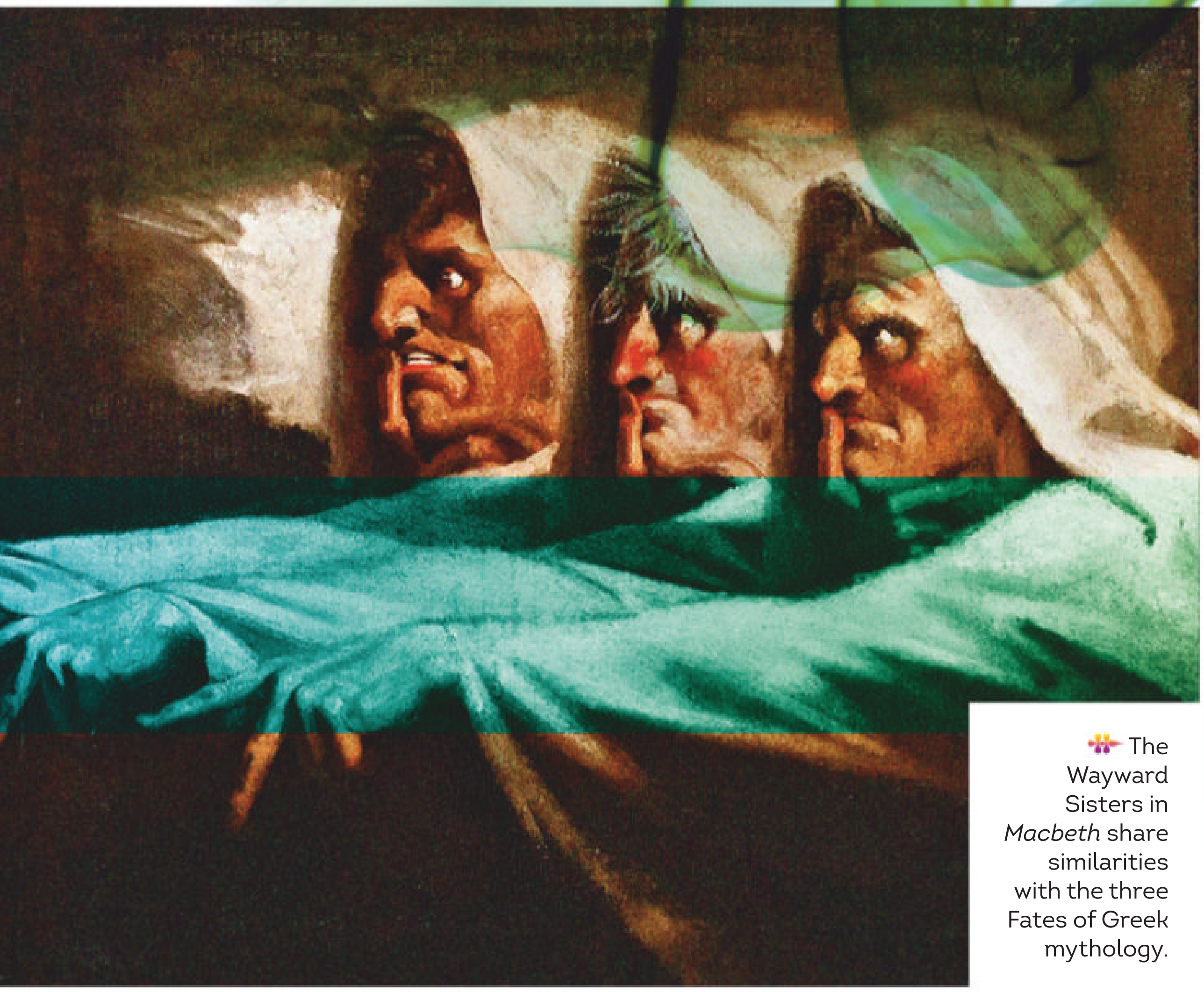


Ursula is still plenty evil in Disney's *The Little Mermaid*, but Ariel gets the guy…and doesn't turn into sea-foam.

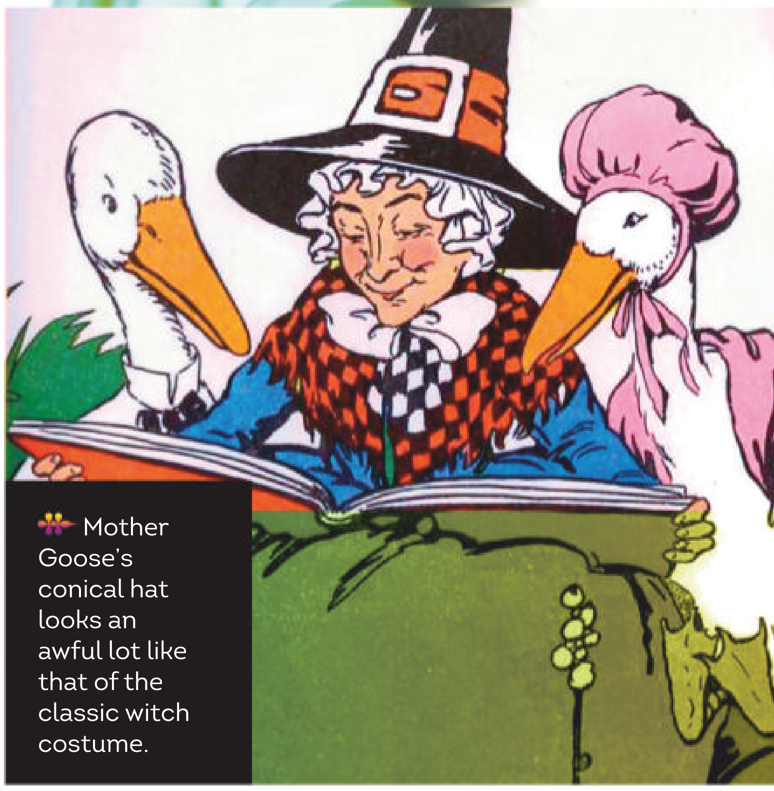
Shakespeare's Three Sisters

Witch hysteria was all the rage in Renaissance Europe when William Shakespeare wrote *Macbeth* in 1606. While their stage time is limited, these "Weird Sisters," who share their prophesies with ambitious Macbeth, heavily influence his murderous power grab and essentially drive the plot. "The *Macbeth* witches provide the dynamism that has made *Macbeth* one of Shakespeare's most intense plays," Lee Jamieson, a theater expert and author, wrote on ThoughtCo.com.

The Bard of Avon knew how to appeal to his audience. "In Shakespeare's England, anxiety about witchcraft and belief in magick and the supernatural were not limited to the lower or uneducated classes," says Carole Levin, PhD, Willa Cather Emerita Professor of History at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Levin goes on to explain that "mischief following anger" was one of the most common charges against suspected witches in cases brought to trial. "Most often, it was old, poor, often widowed women who were accused of these acts of angry revenge. A woman would beg for food or drink, and when she was turned away, she might respond angrily; later, when something unfortunate—such as a bad harvest or an ordinary illness—happened to the person who had denied the woman charity, the old woman would be blamed for their problems. Audiences seeing Shakespeare's witches plotting mischief enacted on stage would have intensified familiar fears of the harm witches could perform in daily life."



The Wayward Sisters in *Macbeth* share similarities with the three Fates of Greek mythology.



Mother Goose's conical hat looks an awful lot like that of the classic witch costume.

Fairy Tales Cast a Spell

The Neapolitan fable collection, *Pentamerone* (subtitled *Lo cunto de li cunti* or *The Tale of Tales*), by Italian poet Giambattista Basile, dates to 1634 and is considered one of the oldest such collections in history, featuring 50 related tales that stem from a frame story in which an angry older woman curses a princess.

The stories included versions of "Cinderella" and "The Snow Queen," and while the witches here are often nefarious in nature, it's worth noting that in this collection's version of "Rapunzel," the long-haired heroine (here known as Petrosinella) learns the magickal arts herself and uses them to escape with her prince.

Writer Wilhelm Grimm of fairy-tale fame, who was heavily influenced by Basile's tome, raved: "Not only were the traditions at that time more complete

in themselves, but the author had a special talent for them and an intimate knowledge of the dialect."

In the 17th century, women had to fight for the right to speak, write and teach when Charles Perrault published *The Tales of Mother Goose* in 1697, which included famous stories such as "Sleeping Beauty" and "Puss in Boots," and was translated into English in 1729 by Robert Samber.

According to Ryoji Tsurumi, author of a journal article titled "The Development of Mother Goose in Britain in the Nineteenth Century," Mother Goose—who is often depicted wearing a pointy hat or flying on the back of a gander—used to be a "wise and witty teller of fairy tales" but that image became obsolete. "Because witchcraft was traditionally associated with the lower-class older woman, assumed to be both poor and ignorant, 'Mother' or 'Old Mother' became a slightly mocking and patronizing way of referring to an alleged witch or prophetess or supernatural figure."

Wilhelm Grimm and his brother Jacob followed suit in the 1800s with their own collection of freaky folk stories, *Children and Household Tales.* It was published in 1812 and features a plethora of witchy women. One of their most famous is the wicked stepmother in their version of "Snow White," who conjures up a poison apple to kill her stepdaughter. Another disturbing depiction of the witch as a mother occurs in "Rapunzel," when the evil witch takes a child as amends for stolen vegetables from her garden.

Often folk stories act as commentary on the culture of the time. One such example is "Hansel and Gretel," which was originally written by Basile and adapted by the Brothers Grimm. In their story, siblings are lost in the woods after being abandoned by their sinister stepmother. Themes of poverty, fear and helplessness are prevalent as the children become trapped by the witch, who lures them with a "house of bread." (Later versions made it even yummier: candy.)

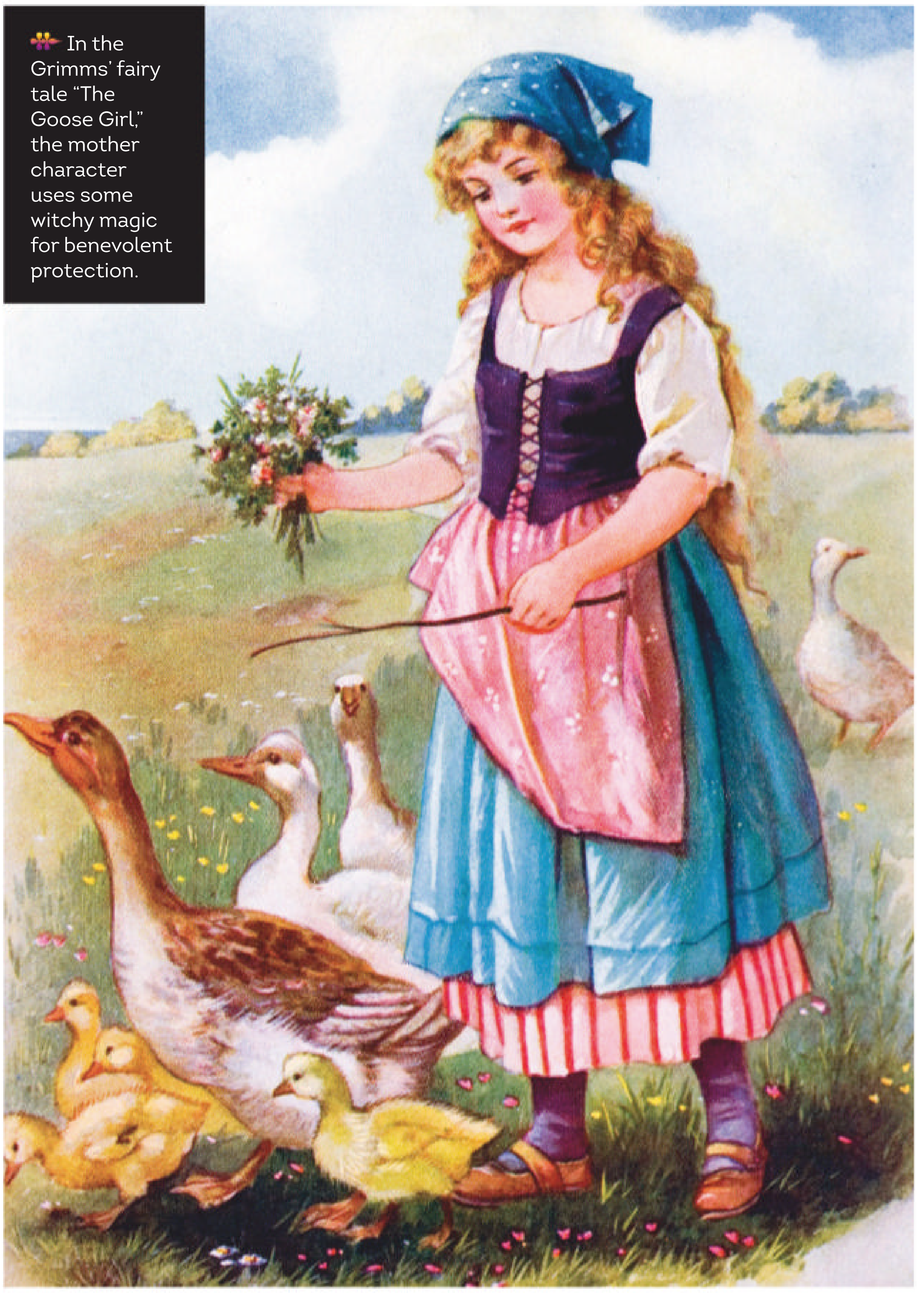
Sea witches have appeared in European folklore for centuries. And in 1837, Hans Christian Andersen introduced us to the most famous—the voice-snatching villain of "The Little Mermaid." (Disney named her Ursula and reworked the salty saga so that the little mermaid, now named Ariel, got her happily ever after with the prince in the 1989 animated film.)

It's not all doom and gloom in Grimms' fairy tales. As award-winning folklorists Sara Cleto, PhD, and Brittany Warman, PhD, founders of The Carterhaugh School of Folklore and the Fantastic, have noted, "In 'The Goose-Girl at the Well,' a witch takes on the mothering role with fierce protectiveness and compassion, guiding the young princess in her care and helping her to better her life."

Sorceresses & Silent Films

In her book *Lights, Camera, Witchcraft*, Heather Greene explains that "witch characters were found predominantly in fantasies, literary adaptations, and historical works—all popular silent-era genres. In those early films, the witch rarely propelled the narrative. She merely existed as a symbolic...element of the plot."

That's the case with director J. Stuart Blackton's 1898 work *The Cavalier's Dream*, which was the first American movie to feature a witch. She wears a cloak and is just one of the strange cast of characters to visit a sleeping cavalier in his dreams. Four years later, a similarly dressed witch again appears to a snoozing hero in the 1902 short *The Devil's Prison.* But both films were made to show off technology rather than tell a cohesive story.



In the Grimms' fairy tale "The Goose Girl," the mother character uses some witchy magic for benevolent protection.

Veronica Lake's Jennifer starts out seeking revenge in *I Married a Witch*. But...it's a rom-com, so things don't go quite as she planned.

"The first narrative film to contain a witch is Vitagraph Studios' short, aptly named *The Witch*," says Greene. It debuted in 1908 and is inspired by Sir Walter Scott's novel *Ivanhoe*.

Good vs. Evil in *Oz*

"Are you a good witch or a bad witch?" Those are the first words Dorothy Gale (Judy Garland) hears as she steps into the full-color world of 1939's *The Wizard of Oz*. Dorothy's confusion—"I'm not a witch at all"—stems from the fact that at the time, witches were just bad news or "old and ugly," as Dorothy puts it.

The movie (and the 1900 L. Frank Baum book on which it's based), introduced the concept of good and bad witches. The Wicked Witch of the West, portrayed by Margaret Hamilton, was a trendsetter as the first American cinematic spellcaster with green skin. "Not long after its release, animators picked up the color cue and used it for their own witches, such as Looney Tunes' Witch Hazel," says Greene.

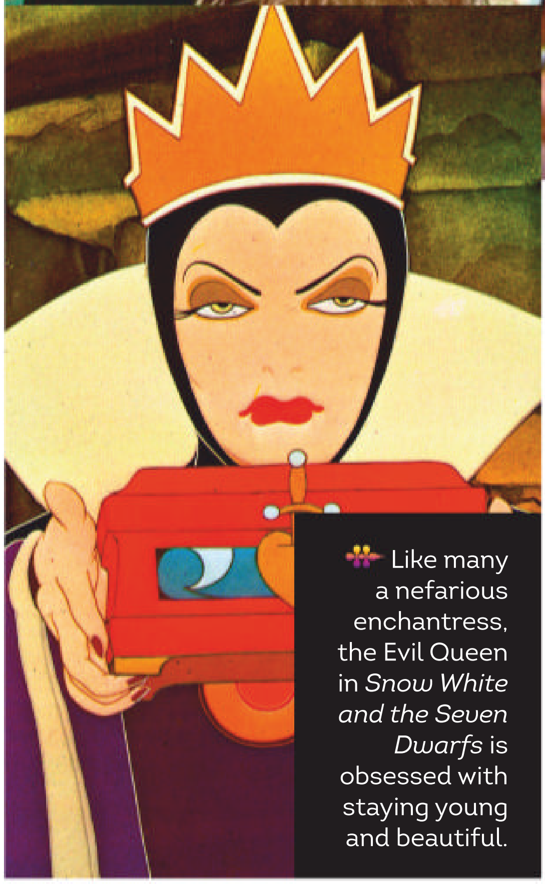
With her porcelain skin, sparkling crown and bubblegum pink ball gown, Glinda the Good Witch (Billie Burke) is not only visually but also magickally the opposite of the Wicked Witch. But that doesn't make her more *pop-u-lar* (as Broadway's *Wicked* would put it). "The Wicked Witch is self-empowered, strong and dominant," Greene says. "Glinda's power comes from her wand, while the Wicked Witch's comes from her own body. This is an important symbolic distinction and, on one level, defines the film's representation of good and bad womanhood. Although the Wicked Witch is clearly the antagonist, viewers love to connect and even align with her strength."

Indeed, the Wicked Witch—who got the name Elphaba and her own story in Gregory Maguire's 1995 novel *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West* (the basis for the smash musical *Wicked*)—is hands-down the most famous pop culture witch of all time, and no doubt one of the key reasons the flick is ranked No. 6 in the American Film Institute's list of 100 Greatest American movies.

Magick Makeover

In the wake of the Great Depression, the witch became more domesticated and, at times, even went glam. Veronica Lake cast a spell on audiences in the 1942 rom-com *I Married a Witch*. The blond femme fatale plays Jennifer, a sorceress burned at the stake in Salem, Massachusetts, who returns centuries later for revenge on her executioner's heirs via a love potion.

"What frightens is more memorable than what comforts," author Heather Greene says of why the Wicked Witch trumps Glinda's (Billie Burke) legacy from *The Wizard of Oz*.



Like many a nefarious enchantress, the Evil Queen in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* is obsessed with staying young and beautiful.

"The crone is an iconic figure that has existed in western culture through folklore for centuries; however, the 'vamp' witch is just as iconic," Greene says. "Historically in paintings and literature, witches have been depicted as naked young women and often seductresses. The Wicked Queen in Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* was the first notable vamp witch. She is followed by Jennifer."

Likewise, in 1958's *Bell, Book and Candle*, Gillian Holroyd, played by Kim Novak, is a modern witch navigating love in New York City. Beautiful and deliciously naughty, this big-screen sorceress wrestles with whether to cast a love spell on her old college rival's fiancé (Jimmy Stewart) and risk falling in love and losing her magickal powers.

As televisions became more commonplace throughout the 1950s, these sexy magickal figures were welcomed into American homes. The best example is Samantha Stephens in *Bewitched*, which aired on ABC from 1964 to 1972. Audiences adored Elizabeth Montgomery as the beautiful blond married to a buttoned-up mortal man. Agnes Moorehead stirred up plenty of trouble as Samantha's meddling mystical mother, Endora, who didn't approve of the mixed-magick marriage. Far from a silly sitcom, *Bewitched* held up a mirror to society during a time when conservatives condemned interracial relationships.

Syfy critic Tai Gooden says that Morticia Addams' (Carolyn Jones) look "inspired millions of Goth girls."

Based on John Updike's novel, *The Witches of Eastwick* was a huge hit, though some practicing witches didn't like the message.

JOSEPH BISHARA IN *THE CONJURING*

Morticia, the slinky matriarch on *The Addams Family*, was created by cartoonist Charles Addams in 1933. Actress Carolyn Jones brought her to life on the 1964 to 1966 ABC series. "She oozed sexiness with a signature style featuring a formfitting black dress," author Tai Gooden wrote for Syfy.com. "It was a stark contrast to the squeaky-clean portrayal of '60s TV marriage that didn't even allow most couples to sleep in the same bed." We got Catherine Zeta-Jones' take on the role in the 2022 Netflix series *Wednesday*.

Later that decade, on *Dark Shadows*, Angelique Bouchard Collins (Lara Parker) gained a cult following as the sensual 17th-century witch making undead life a bitch for vampire Barnabas Collins on ABC's popular Gothic soap opera.

In the 1980s, sexy spellcasters included besties, played by Susan Sarandon, Cher and Michelle Pfeiffer, who shake up the titular town in 1987's *The Witches of Eastwick* (a remake directed by Ninja Thyberg is in the works). Cassandra Peterson, on the other hand, played it vampy and campy as the titular witch in the 1988 film *Elvira: Mistress of the Dark*.

Ten years later, *Practical Magic* (1998) put a positive spin on the craft as it cast gorgeous stars Sandra Bullock and Nicole Kidman as conjuring sisters Sally and Gillian Owens, who are on a mission to reverse their family's curse.

> **"THE WICKED WITCH WAS A SOURCE OF FEAR AND EMPOWERMENT. SHE INDULGED IN HER DECISIVENESS."**
>
> *Author Heather Greene*

Trial Terror

Not all portrayals were so pretty. Barbara Creed, author of *The Monstrous-Feminine*, has said the witch in a horror film is "invariably represented as an old, ugly crone...[who's] capable of monstrous acts."

Indeed, the hag in 1988's *Pumpkinhead* is wrinkled and horrifying, and Bathsheba—the ghost witch from *The Conjuring* (2013)—is terrifying as she possesses the matriarchs of families that move to her land and makes them murder their own families.

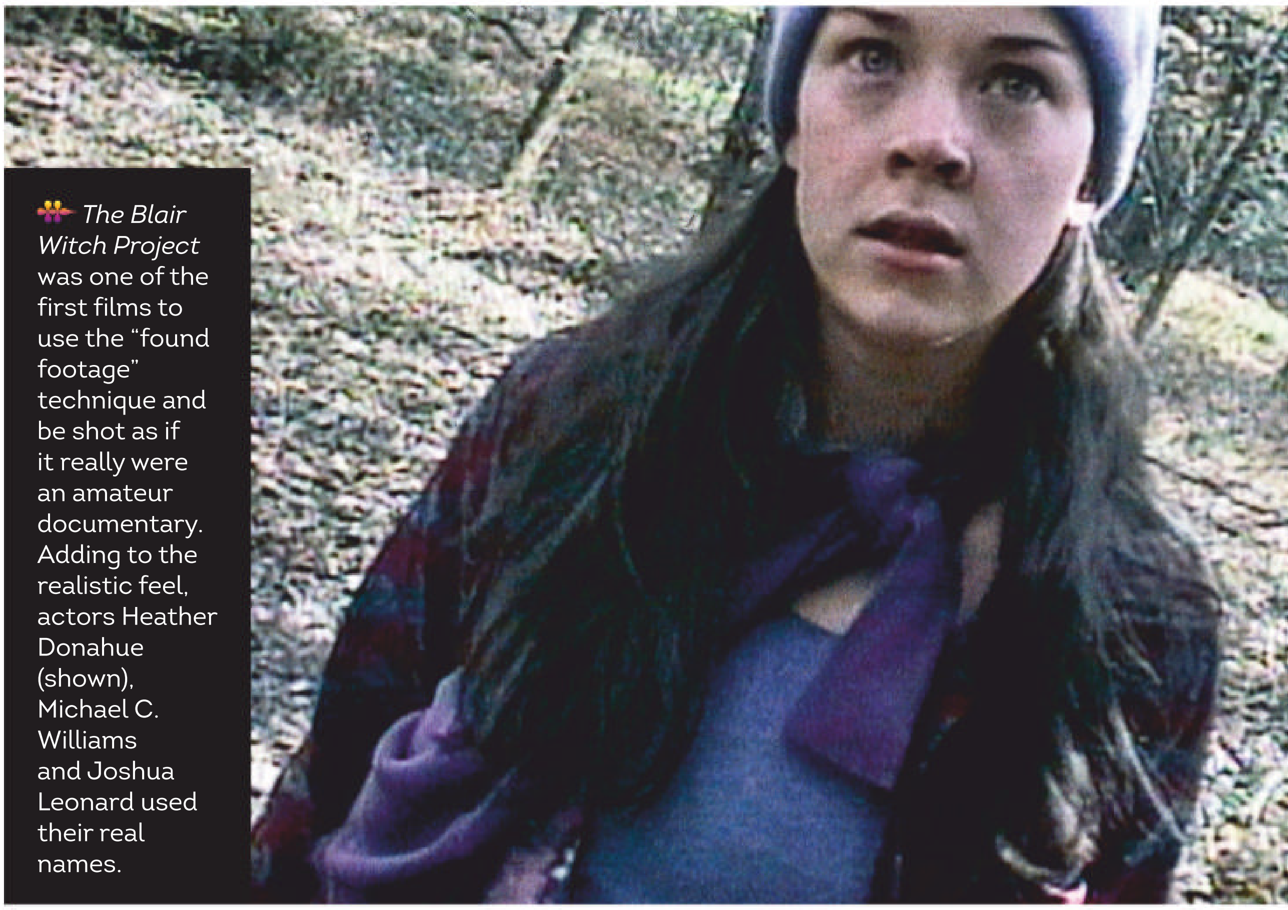
In *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), a trio of ill-fated amateur documentary filmmakers seek out the title scarer, who's allegedly the ghost of an 18th-century witch who lures victims into her secluded woodland home and makes them stand facing the corner as she murders them.

Coven leader Margaret Morgan is the most memorable character in Rob Zombie's *The Lords of Salem* (2012). She's the head hag in charge of a group of ancient, Satan-worshipping women. Before her 17th-century execution, she cursed the women of Salem to be "the vessel by which the devil's child would inherit the Earth."

The Witches (1990) continued the classic trope of child-murdering she-devils with a coven of nasties—led by the Grand High Witch, played big and bad by Anjelica Huston—looking to turn the world's children into mice by feeding them potion-spiked confections. (Anne Hathaway led a new crew in a 2020 remake.) *Hocus Pocus* (1993) was the story of the 300-year-old Sanderson sisters, Winifred (Bette

Midler), Mary (Kathy Najimy) and Sarah (Sarah Jessica Parker) who awaken to wreak comical havoc on kids in modern-day Salem. In *Hocus Pocus 2,* now streaming on Disney+, they return to meddle with a new crop of teens.

Speaking of Salem, the plots of countless horror movies have been inspired by the brutality of witch hunts around the world. In *The Undead* (1957), a young woman gets hypnotized and realizes she's on trial for being a witch. The West German horror film *Mark of the Devil* (1970) was advertised as "positively the most horrifying film ever made" for its graphic depiction of women being tortured in 18th-century Austria. And the 1996 retelling of Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible* stars then "it" girl Winona Ryder as Abigail Williams, who accuses her lover's wife of witchcraft in 1692 Salem.



The Blair Witch Project was one of the first films to use the "found footage" technique and be shot as if it really were an amateur documentary. Adding to the realistic feel, actors Heather Donahue (shown), Michael C. Williams and Joshua Leonard used their real names.

Upon its release in 1993, *Hocus Pocus* was a critical and commercial flop. Still, it became such a cult classic that a sequel with the original stars was released in 2022.

Gabourey Sidibe (left) and Taissa Farmiga (center) play students at a very special New Orleans school run by Cordelia Goode (Sarah Paulson) on the commercially and critically acclaimed *American Horror Story: Coven.*

American Horror Story: Coven (2013) brought horror back to TV with Angela Bassett as famed New Orleans Voodoo queen Marie Laveau and Kathy Bates as Delphine LaLaurie. The story carried over into the franchise's eighth season, *Apocalypse*.

Animated Witches & Anime

Cartoon witches run the gamut from cute to creepy. Their roots can be traced back to 1937 when Disney adapted a fairy tale for its first feature-length animated film, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*.

FAIRUZA BALK IN *THE CRAFT*

And similar characters pop up quite frequently in Japanese anime. "In anime depictions, witches are portrayed in a range of ambiguous curiosity to showcase terrifying cautionary tales," says Shannon Sweeting, a cinema scholar and founder of InAsianSpaces.com. "While witches depicted in Western culture usually inherit their powers as a teenager, possessing an evil spirit [is a trait that] can be passed down through generations of a Japanese family."

As an example, Sweeting cites the manga series *Natsume's Book of Friends*. "Takashi Natsume inherits his late grandmother Reiko's book of spiritual contracts. Since Natsume is a direct blood relative who also inherited Reiko's ability to see spirits, the bound yokai [supernatural entities] within the book are contractually obligated to answer Natsume's call, lending him their power in times of need."

Anime witches aren't always scary, however. "In [1989's] *Kiki's Delivery Service*, Kiki is a young witch who's just turned 13. She and her talking black cat, Jiji, journey away from home for Kiki's traditional witch training," says Sweeting. "Throughout the film, there is never any negative connotation associated with Kiki being a witch."

Reign of the Teen Queens

While teen witches first appeared in the 1970s—notably the Archie comics spinoff *Sabrina the Teen-Age Witch*—they didn't hit their stride until the 1990s with *The Craft* (1996). The film about angsty adolescents evoking witchcraft to stick it to bullies inspired a generation of Goth girls.

"For teens who feel unseen or unheard in their lives, films such as *The Craft* offer something more profound—a way to embrace their identities and find their own power," says Greene. "It is no coincidence that modern witchcraft and other occult practices, like tarot, have also soared in popularity among teens." (A 2020 reboot, *The Craft: Legacy*, was far less memorable.)

At the same time, on the small screen, teens were enchanting audiences with shows such as *Sabrina the Teenage Witch*, (1996–2003) starring Melissa Joan Hart,

To prepare for her role as Dr. Rowan Fielding in the *Mayfair Witches*, Alexandra Daddario not only read all six of the novels, but she researched author Anne Rice's life as well. "You can always bring that in when you least expect it," she told an audience at New York Comic Con.

THE WITCHING HOUR IS NIGH

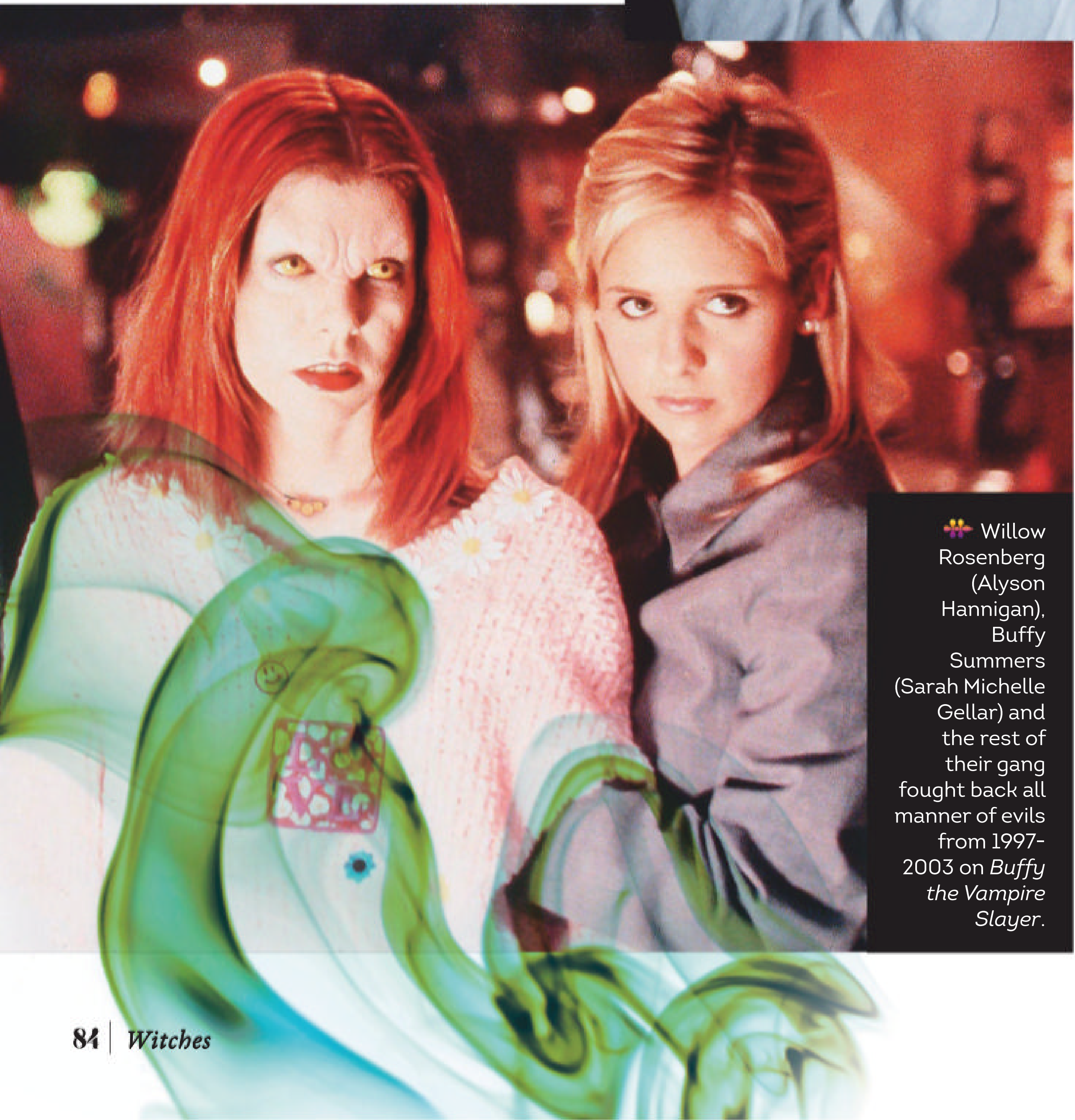
Anne Rice might be best known for her vampire novels, but her universe is witchy as well! Now viewers are getting to see that magick on the small screen with AMC's *Mayfair Witches*. "The series will focus on an intuitive young neurosurgeon (*White Lotus*' Alexandra Daddario) who discovers she is the unlikely heir to a family of witches. As she grapples with her newfound powers, she must contend with a sinister presence that has haunted her family for generations," according to the official synopsis from the network—the same one behind 2022's adaptation of *Interview With the Vampire*. Like that series, *Mayfair*—which is derived from *The Witching Hour*, the first book in the series—is set in Louisiana, "in that mood of New Orleans and the sort of ghost story of this house," creator Esta Spalding has said. Co-creator Michelle Ashford has noted that audiences can expect a feminist slant: "Rice's particular lens on witches explored something new altogether. Women who are powerful, often brutal, and always committed to subverting our current power structures." The cast also includes *L.A. Law*'s Harry Hamlin as patriarch Cortland Mayfair as well as Annabeth Gish, Tongayi Chirisa, Beth Grant and Jack Huston in a role he described as "a dark entity spirit." But fans of the book, beware: Not everything in the 1,000-plus page tome makes it to the screen. "The characters are not exactly the same," Hamlin said at New York Comic Con. "The story's not exactly the same. They've taken the whole ethos of the witches ...and they have compiled it into what is a really wonderful, engaging television show. It's not a book. It's a TV show."

and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) with Sarah Michelle Gellar in the title role. A trio of witch sisters, portrayed by Alyssa Milano, Shannen Doherty and Holly Marie Combs, helped propel *Charmed* to become the highest-rated debut ever for the WB in 1998. "Witch stories can provide escapism for all teens of any gender and spark their imagination," says Greene. "In the 1990s, they were pinned to the trending social current often labeled third-wave feminism or 'girl power.' Witches, after all, are often allegorical depictions of girls or a woman's search for agency."

By the end of the '90s, the Spice Girls had taken "girl power" on as their battle cry. Soon, a little witchy wonder named Hermione Granger (Emma Watson in the *Harry Potter* films) would entrance movie fans and help fuel the success of J.K. Rowling's series of books, which has sold more than 500 million copies.

Disney got on board with the TV movie *Twitches* (2005), based on the Scholastic book series and starring former child stars Tia and Tamera Mowry. It quickly followed that up with the Disney Channel's *Wizards of Waverly Place* (2007), which cast Selena Gomez as a spellcaster trying to navigate everyday teenage life in Manhattan. Come 2009, Kat Graham began playing Mystic Falls' resident witch Bonnie Bennett in Netflix's *The Vampire Diaries*.

"She's now a woman, with the awesome power to determine her own life," *Marie Claire*'s Diane Cohen raved of Thomasin (Anya Taylor-Joy) in 2015's *The Witch*.



Willow Rosenberg (Alyson Hannigan), Buffy Summers (Sarah Michelle Gellar) and the rest of their gang fought back all manner of evils from 1997-2003 on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

Contemporary Characters

"Witches in current popular culture are no longer safe and fluffy; they are quite a dangerous version of 'the Witch.' They perhaps allow permission for women to transgress," Marion Gibson, PhD, professor of Renaissance and magic literature at England's University of Exeter, explained to *Grazia*.

For proof, look no further than 2015's feminist *The Witch*. Set in a hyper-religious Puritan community in the 1630s, teenager Thomasin (Anya Taylor-Joy) is blamed by her family for all manner of evils, from a baby's disappearance to seducing and

Many *Harry Potter* fans note that the boys wouldn't have survived book one if not for Hermione (Emma Watson in the films).

sickening her brothers. It's perhaps not particularly surprising that she opts to "live deliciously" when the devil—in the form of the family goat Black Thomas—offers her another way to be.

Meanwhile Sleeping Beauty's bully Maleficent was able to tell her side of things in her titular 2014 Disney flick. As Natalie Wilson noted for *Ms. Magazine,* "There is much to be said of the film from a feminist perspective, from its wonderful revisioning of the character Aurora, played fantastically by Elle Fanning, to its condemnation of fairies who see beauty and eternal happiness as great gifts for a female, and most significantly, to the fact we *finally* have a positive, complex depiction of a witch/mother figure in Maleficent, brought to life exquisitely by Angelina Jolie."

From 2018 to 2020, Netflix necromanced the world's favorite teenage witch Sabrina Spellman back to life with its *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*. Played by Kiernan Shipka (*Mad Men*), it presented the young witch as so powerful that she seems immune to death. (The story is continuing in the upcoming comic-book series *The Occult World of Sabrina*.) "[As in] anime like *Puella Magi Madoka Magica* or in *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, the darker side of witchcraft is not shied away from," says Sweeting. "These shows depict the blood price the young witches pay for quite literally selling their soul to the devil."

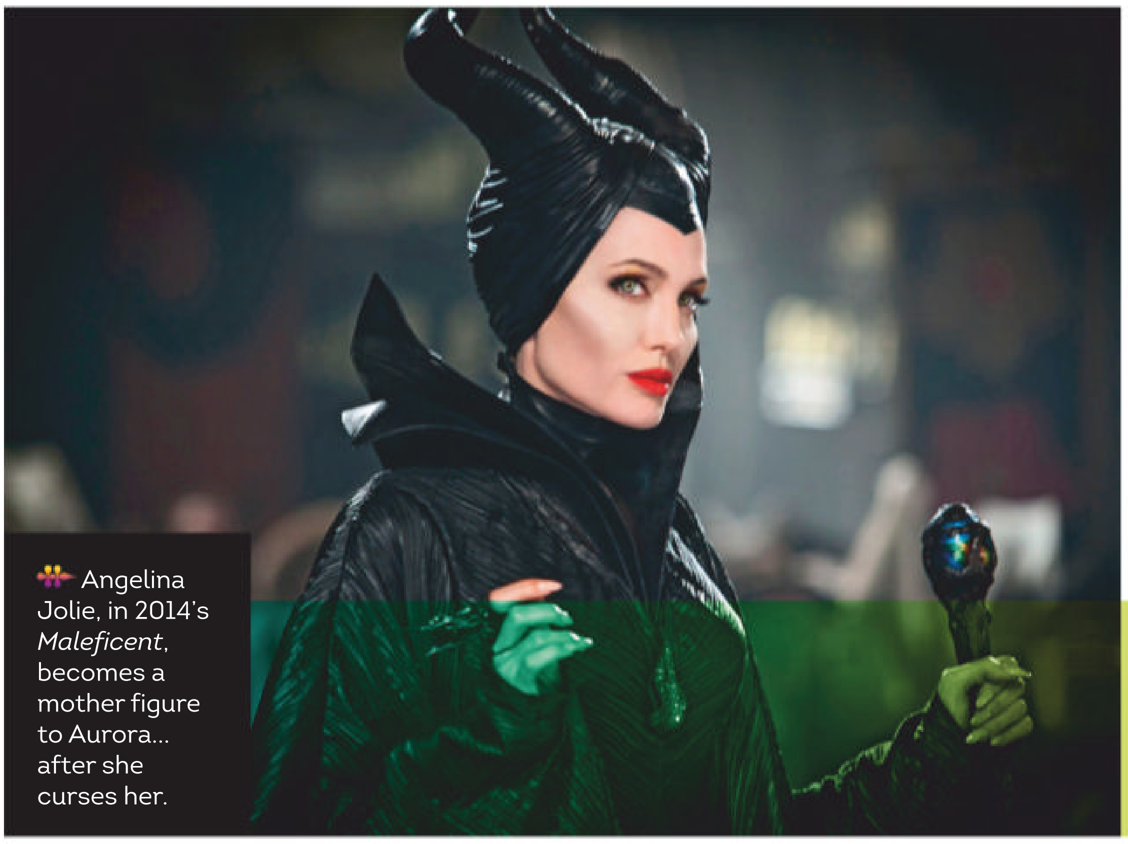
Women clearly identify with the archetype; according to ***Billboard,*** witch was the most popular Halloween costume in 2022, thanks in part to *Hocus Pocus 2* and Marvel's superhero sorceress Wanda Maximoff (Elizabeth Olsen) on Disney+'s *WandaVision*. Also known as the Scarlet Witch, Wanda has the power to unleash chaos magick, which comes in handy when she needs to fight her deceptive neighbor, the diabolical witch Agatha Harkness (Kathryn Hahn), who's getting her own spinoff series sometime in 2023-2024. (Fans were none-too-pleased with Wanda's stereotypical desperate mother turn in *Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness*, however.)

Greene says these contemporary witch stories "capture this legacy, particularly as it pertains to teen girls and women, and that makes them popular, particularly during times of cultural upheaval, feminist or other social movements."

Considering the current state of world affairs, it'll be interesting to see which witch commands our attention next.

"HERMIONE IS THE ONE WITH THE PLAN. SHE'S IN CONTROL."

Emma Watson to Glamour *on alter ego Hermione Granger*



Angelina Jolie, in 2014's *Maleficent*, becomes a mother figure to Aurora... after she curses her.

Playing THE *Part*

Lotte Verbeek (Outlander's *Geillis Duncan), Carice van Houten* (Game of Thrones' *Melisandre) and Amber Benson* (Buffy the Vampire Slayer's *Tara Maclay) discuss their enchanting roles and all things witchy.*

BY JENNIFER VINEYARD

Lotte Verbeek says she imagines Geillis prepped for her time travel by taking along some self-defense tools through the stones of Craigh na Dun: "Maybe she carried around a little bit of Mace or pepper spray," she shares.

OUTLANDISH

Lotte Verbeek clears up some of the mystery behind *Outlander*'s most notorious witch.

Call her Gillian Edgars in the 1960s. Or Geillis Duncan, if you're in 18th-century Scotland. Or, if you're in Jamaica in the 1700s, try The Bakra or Mrs. Abernathy. We usually refer to *Outlander*'s resident Black Widow as Geillis, even though that's just one of her many aliases, because that's who she is when we meet her in Season 1. The moniker has a real-life historical connection: It's the name of a Scottish woman accused of and executed for witchcraft in the 16th century, kicking off the North Berwick witch trials—the nation's largest and most infamous.

The real Geillis was probably wrongfully accused, but our Geillis is no innocent—her dead husbands, rape victims and mistreated slaves can all attest to her dark side. But actress Lotte Verbeek found it helpful to do a deep dive into the Burning Times in order to inhabit this singularly compelling figure.

"In my research, what I learned was that if you were a little too intelligent, or a little too intuitive, you were called a witch," Verbeek says. "Or physically, if you were too skinny. If you were a redhead. I tick all the boxes! If I went back in time, I would have been accused of witchcraft for sure!"

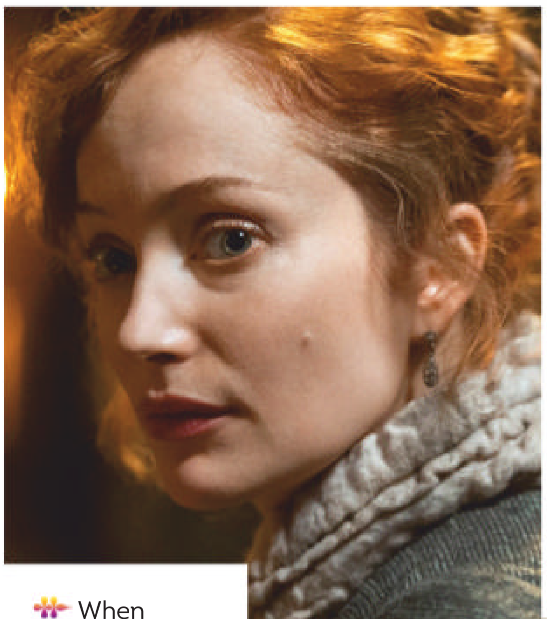
The fictional Geillis has even more strikes against her—a reputation as a witch (but no complaint that this was slander), inherited wealth and living a solitary life all put her at risk for this kind of legal injustice.

"It's a funny thing that accusations of witchcraft were reserved mostly for women," Verbeek says. "And it's because of power. In those times, men had the power, and this was a way for them to maintain that power. It was about fear of women having a piece of the pie, basically."

Verbeek remembers seeing a scale that was once used to weigh accused witches in her native Holland. (If you were found to be too light, you could be burned.) To prepare for Geillis' imprisonment and trial scenes, Verbeek visited a Scottish museum exhibit of some of the torture instruments used to force confessions ("very violent and brutal," she reports). Still, in the world of the show, no possible punishment could deter Geillis from her time-traveling mission to support Scottish nationalism and the Jacobite cause, even if her belief that the mission required blood sacrifice turned out to be erroneous. ("To sacrifice a husband is no big deal to Geillis, if that's what it takes to change history," she says.)

But Geillis isn't just a political rebel, she's a social one, too, refusing to conform to the standards of her adopted time. Just look at the tartan earasaid she flips over one shoulder, Renaissance Faire-style. Or note her scandalous lack of a corset. (Remember she's actually a creature of 1968—the heyday of bra-burning; Geillis naturally saw corsets as oppressive.) "I don't know how visible it is," Verbeek says. "It's not like my bosoms are floating all over your screen. I thought it was revealing the kind of women she is. As dangerous as it would be to be who she is in that century, she likes to push boundaries, which is literally playing with her life."

Some see Geillis as evil, but for others, she's more complicated—after all, she did sacrifice herself to save Claire (Caitríona Balfe). Despite her demise, she'll be back for Season 7–time travel certainly has its advantages! (So does the fact that Diana Gabaldon's novels offer further Geillis adventures). "I find it interesting how the audience responds to Geillis," Verbeek says. "Some people were sad to see her go. I certainly was!"



When filming ended Lotte Verbeek shares that she fittingly got a "Scotland Forever" T-shirt as a gift.

Because Melisandre was actually hundreds of years old on *GOT*, fans hope Carice van Houten will appear on the prequel series *House of the Dragon*. "I'd love that!" van Houten says.

Van Houten spoke to therapists to prep for her boundary-crossing role in *Instinct*.

SEEING RED

Carice van Houten looks back at *Game of Thrones* and ahead to new projects.

Carice van Houten almost never made it to Westeros—not as Melisandre, anyway.

The *Game of Thrones* team had initially asked the Dutch actress to audition for the role of Cersei Lannister (which eventually went to Lena Headey). Even though she thought it was a great part, van Houten had to pass–she was busy shooting the 2011 horror film *Intruders*. Then, during preproduction for Season 2, *GOT* producers asked again–but this time for the role of the red priestess, Melisandre. Van Houten knew it was a good project, but she was still unsure.

"Apart from the fact that it was well written," she says, "I just thought, 'Is this for me?'" To help her decide, the actress reached out to the biggest fantasy fan she knew, *Late Night* host Seth Meyers, whose brother Josh she once dated. She sent Seth a text and got an immediate response: "Are you crazy? This is the coolest thing ever!" "I wish I had saved that message," she says.

After winning the part and reporting to the set, van Houten was still uncertain. Even though she was a five-time winner of the Golden Calf—the Dutch equivalent of the Oscar—she felt out of her depth trying to figure out what made the mysterious Melisandre tick. George R. R. Martin's novels, on which the series is based, weren't much help, since Melisandre doesn't get a point-of-view section until Book Five, *A Dance with Dragons*—and that didn't even come out until she'd already been cast.

> **"I WOULD HAVE LIKED TO HAVE SEEN MELISANDRE RELAX AND HAVE A SPA DAY, BE A LITTLE LESS FANATIC."**
>
> *Carice van Houten*

Van Houten peppered the *GOT* showrunners with questions. Their lone response: "She's really old, but we'll get to that later." While that makes sense to fans now, at the time van Houten wasn't sure what it meant. One thing was clear: Melisandre was a very different character from the sort the actress normally played—flawed, vulnerable, sometimes self-loathing women, not nearly immortal magickal beings. (Even the "witch" she played in 2010's *Black Death* wasn't all that magickal.)

"I tried and tried to get them to tell me more, but I only got a minimal amount of information," she says. "It made me create something for myself, and I had to hope they would let me know if I was going in the wrong direction."

During her first big scene—where Melisandre burns effigies on a Dragonstone beach—van Houten struggled with the emotional complexity. "I had to be all-confident, religiously stern, sexual—and this was my first day! I just had to bluff my way through it." Everyone was convinced.

But as other characters on the show evolved, she wondered if Melisandre would ever get her turn, thinking, "When is my character going to show some flaws?" She was grateful for occasional humorous interludes, but wanted more. "I hugely enjoyed bringing a lightness to her character," she shares. "I wanted to make a joke at the end of every f---ing scene!" (To view van Houten's flair for comedy, check out Meyers' *Late Night* sketch in which Melisandre attends a baby shower.)

Once Melisandre experienced a setback, she became far more interesting to play. "My favorite thing," van Houten says, "was when she heard that the burning of Shireen [Kerry Ingram] was all for nothing." Stannis' [Stephen Dillane] men deserted, then his wife killed herself and it became

Melisandre may have been the fire, but van Houten felt the ice on set—even in the summer. "In between takes, I was holding three hot water bottles against my chest," she shares.

clear the blood sacrifice of his daughter was a mistake. When Melisandre realized what a waste it had all been, "her whole world came tumbling down," van Houten recalls, and she managed to communicate this with little more than a subtle shift of an eyebrow.

She attributes the nonverbal power she can sometimes project to her "silent-film upbringing." Her late father, Theodore, was a film historian who brought her up on the body language and voiceless techniques of Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton. "[In] a lot of scripts…I wonder, 'Why am I saying this? I can act this with a look.' So I always tend to take out a lot of lines."

Despite that fact, van Houten hungered for a "nice, long monologue for her *GOT* alter ego—I would have loved that." Instead, she got a wordless, shocking reveal: the truth of Melisandre's real age. It was a scene van Houten was naturally delighted to play, even if it required five-and-a-half hours of prosthetic makeup to turn her into an old crone. (Forgetting she had the makeup on, van Houten was startled to see her reflection during bathroom breaks.) This was a newly fragile Melisandre, "a completely different character," van Houten says—one she could imbue with wisdom, remorse, doubt and fatigue.

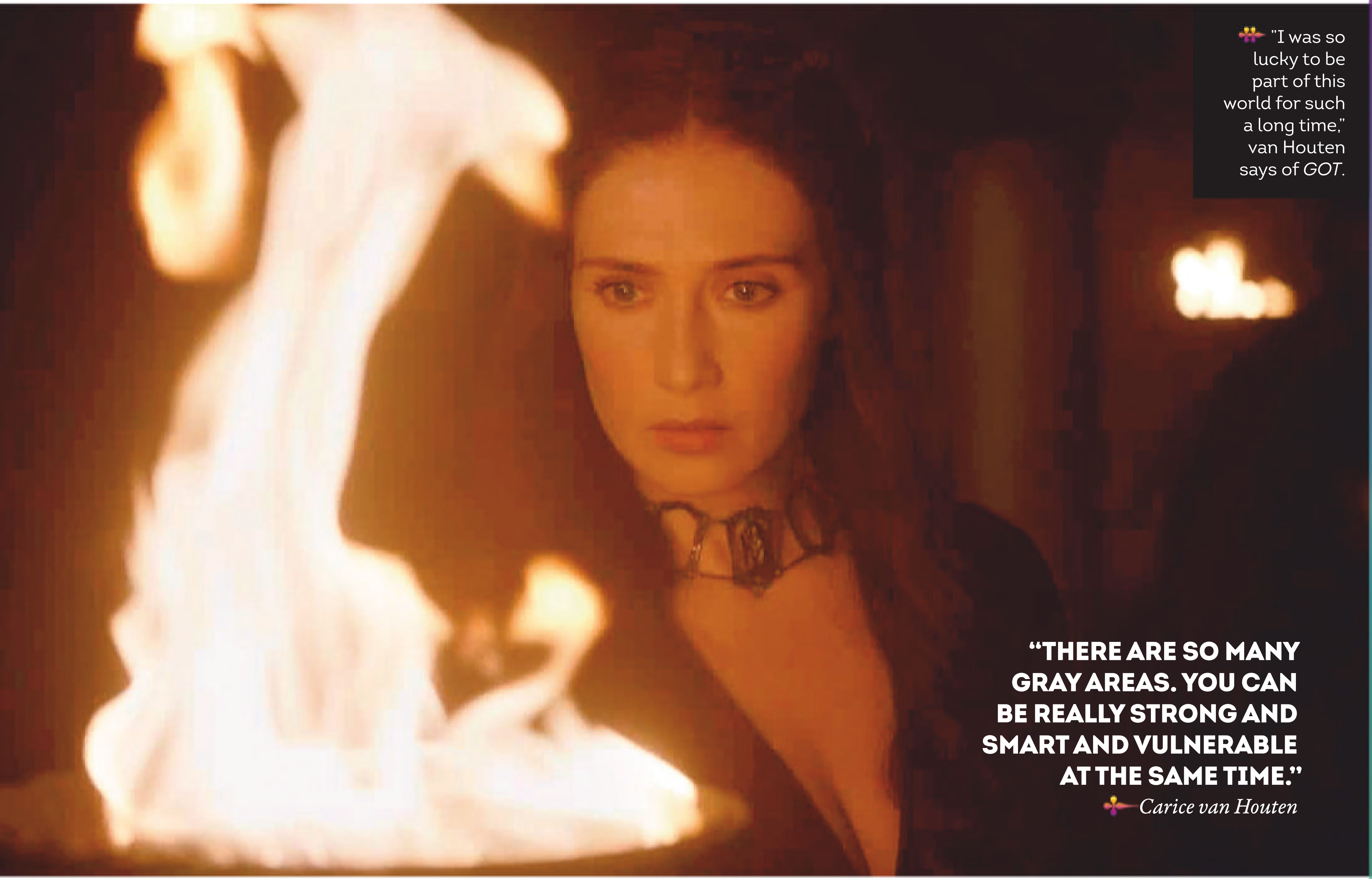
Van Houten's own postpartum state during Season 7 helped her create a feeling that Melisandre was nearly done with this world. In Season 8, she completed that mission, and her sacrifice made us rethink what we knew of the Red Woman. "I never saw her as evil," she says. "I didn't want to play her as a Cruella de Vil. This felt like going out with a bang, because I could show that she was actually in it for the good."

Melisandre left van Houten eager to play more conflicted, ambiguous characters, so she's right at home as Jacqueline de Montrachet in the Starz series *Dangerous Liaisons*, a prequel to the famed book. "We can't make every woman superwoman," she explains. "We're all complex human beings."

Teaming up with BFF, actress and director Halina Reijn, van Houten also started the production company Man Up. Their first project, the 2019 film *Instinct*, was the Dutch entry in that year's Oscar race. The movie is a taboo-breaking thriller that questions sexual power relationships using as a backdrop a rehabilitation program that is thought to reduce recidivism, but has had mixed results.

"We try to give criminals a second chance through a lot of therapy," van Houten says, "but that doesn't always work." Watching her character Nicoline, a trained psychiatrist, draw menacingly closer to a serial rapist, the film asks which of them is really the victim. It's complicated.

Another of van Houten's Man Up projects examining power is the noir series *Red Light* (available on Amazon Prime), about sex work, sex trafficking and female rage. Once again, it twists conventional ideas of victimhood. "It's not always the men who are perpetrators, or women who are victims. I think we're all Little Red Riding Hood, and we're all the Big Bad Wolf, in one," van Houten says. "We have to see that and embrace it."



"I was so lucky to be part of this world for such a long time," van Houten says of *GOT*.

"THERE ARE SO MANY GRAY AREAS. YOU CAN BE REALLY STRONG AND SMART AND VULNERABLE AT THE SAME TIME."
Carice van Houten

BOOK OF SHADOWS

Amber Benson has gone from portraying a witch to writing about them.

AMBER BENSON

Amber Benson has always loved witches. Long before she played coming-of-age spellcaster (and Willow's girlfriend) Tara Maclay on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* or started writing her novel series *The Witches of Echo Park*, Benson devoured books about the occult, mythology and religion. Some of her early favorites include Starhawk's *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Goddess* (for more turn to page 29), and Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon* series, which re-centered Arthurian legends around the pagan priestess Morgan le Fay.

"That stuff was always fascinating to me," Benson says. "I was very interested in Celtic mythology and the Druid aspects of that. Magick was really intriguing to me, the idea that there was something beyond what we could intuit from our senses."

The *Avalon* influence can be felt in an especially erotic scene in *The Witches of Echo Park*. Lead character Lyse's "antler-man-sex-fantasy" is a direct nod to Morgan and Arthur's kingmaking sex ritual–before they recognized each other as half-siblings–as the Horned God and the Virgin Huntress. "Having sex with the Horned God as the marriage of the feminine to the masculine, that stuff was very intriguing to me," says Benson, whose other novels include a series about the Grim Reaper's daughter.

With her witch books, Benson also wanted to explore the idea of magick. Does it exist inside all of us? Can it be felt in simple everyday experiences? Is it communing with nature? Is it intuition? Empathy? Is it found in our dreams? Rather than appropriate anyone else's practice, Benson decided to create her own for the series.

Her witches, who prefer the term "blood sisters," have magickal skills ranging from clairvoyance and dream weaving to extreme empathy. "There are pieces of lots of different things," Benson says, including coexisting universes and one alternate universe known as the dreamlands. "It goes off into all kinds of weird stuff!"

Benson thinks witches are having a moment right now "because if you have a uterus, your rights are being taken away from you." Having the power to fight back, and having a coven as a support group, is "exciting." It certainly helped attract a wider audience to her book series, which she's been attempting to adapt as both a podcast and a TV show. Benson developed the TV pitch with her friend and fellow writer Mo Perkins (*A Quiet Little Marriage*), and they created new characters and a new world for the adaptation. Catherine Hardwicke (*Twilight*) is attached to direct, and Benson says she created a "fabulous" lookbook for the show.

In pitching the project to networks, the team always referenced the Oracle of Los Angeles, Amanda Yates Garcia, and real-life Wiccans who had cast spells to prevent Donald Trump from doing serious harm while president. "The idea of crowd-sourcing spells was very interesting to me," she says. "And the idea of using feminine power to protect other people, to protect the planet, was baked into it for me."

She is currently searching for a network or streaming platform to produce the show. Any sex-positive networks out there, give her a call!

The Witches of Echo Park
AMBER BENSON
The Last Dream Keeper
AN ECHO PARK COVEN NOVEL
AMBER BENSON
The End of Magic
AN ECHO PARK COVEN NOVEL
AMBER BENSON

Benson wrote a true-crime-style podcast adaptation of the series, where a podcaster tries to find the missing author (to be played by Benson) in order to learn about the witches.

LANA HARPER'S

Literary Spell

The bestselling author of Payback's a Witch *opens up about her enchanting supernatural rom-coms.*

BY SHARI GOLDHAGEN

Lana Harper never intended to become a writer, but her millions of fans are certainly glad she did!

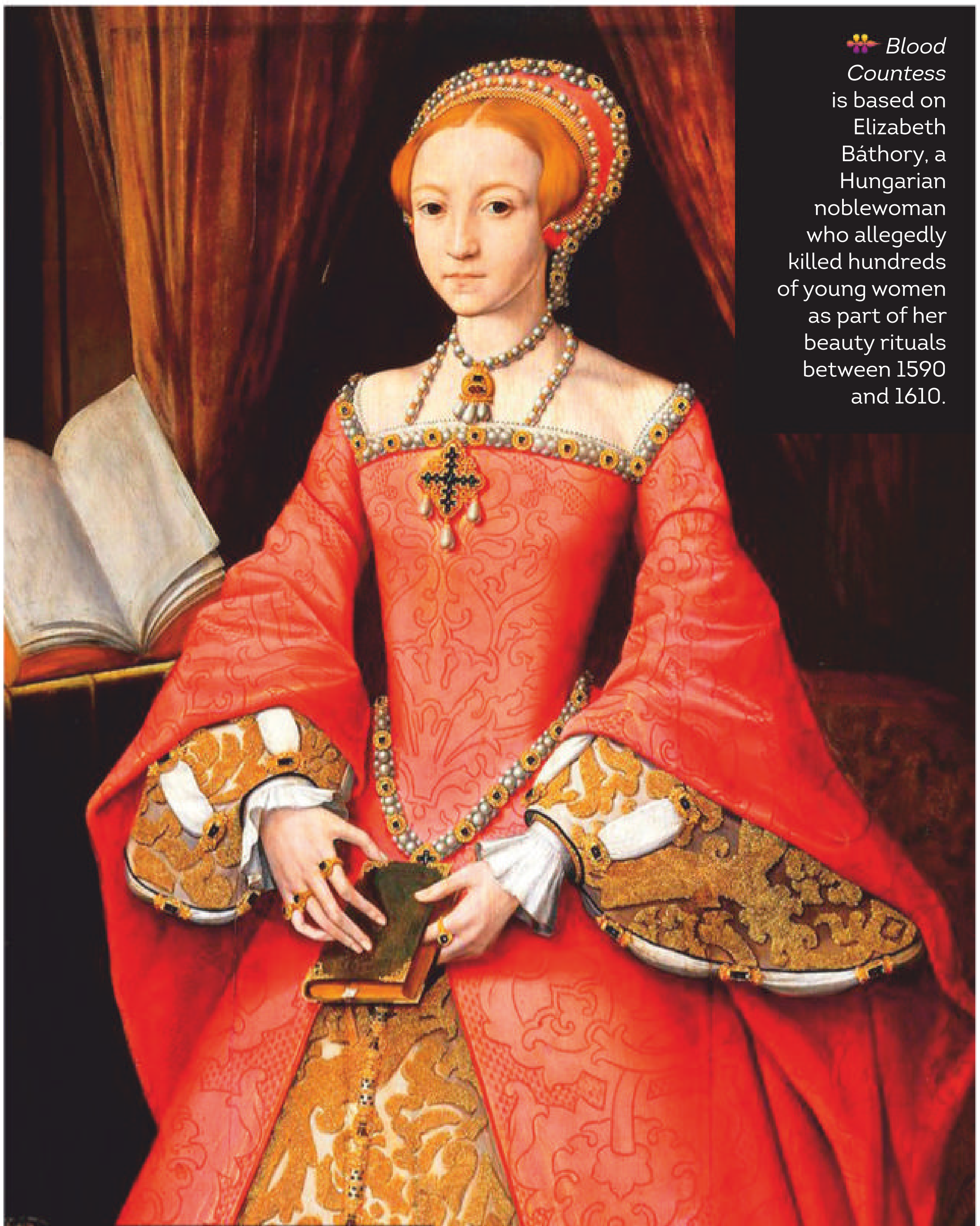
Payback's a Witch, the 2021 adult novel debut from Lana Harper, cast a spell on readers and reviewers alike. "This magical joyride manages to feel both vibrantly current and timelessly mystical while avoiding the typical queer rom-com stereotypes," touted *Publishers Weekly* in a starred review, while *The New York Times* critic Olivia Waite gushed that the tale was "the sexy sapphic modern Gothic I didn't know I needed!"

The novel was an instant sensation. It sees prodigal witch Emmy Harlow return to her magickal hometown of Thistle Grove for her family's spellcasting tournament only to discover that fellow witches Linden and Talia have been hurt by Gareth, the same sexy sorcerer who broke Emmy's heart before. While the trio plot revenge *John Tucker Must Die*-style, Emmy can't stop thinking about one of her romantic rivals.

In May 2022, fans were able to learn more about the four magickal families of Thistle Grove in *From Bad to Cursed*, a similarly celebrated follow-up about Talia's kid sis Issa Avramov in a *Romeo & Juliet*-esque romance with Rowan Thorn. A third book, *Back in a Spell*, drops in January, and focuses on another resident, Nineve Blackmoore, and her curious connection to a nonbinary shop owner. Preorder sales are going strong.

Before setting the adult supernatural world on fire, Harper—who grew up in Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania, and currently lives in Chicago with her family—got her start writing young adult (YA) tales under the name Lana Popović. Those included *Wicked Like a Wildfire* and *Fierce Like a Firestorm*, plus the Slayer series of novels about some of history's most infamous witches, such as alleged blood-drinking Countess Elizabeth Báthory and Catherine Monvoisin, who was at the center of a poisoning scandal in Louis XIV's court.

Here, the bestselling author chats with *Witches* about her writing journey, her inspiration and what's next.



Blood Countess is based on Elizabeth Báthory, a Hungarian noblewoman who allegedly killed hundreds of young women as part of her beauty rituals between 1590 and 1610.

"A sexy, funny, charming romp of a novel that scratches that witchy, autumnal itch just right."—#1 New York Times bestselling author EMILY HENRY
PAYBACK'S A WITCH
LANA HARPER
A NOVEL

You studied psychology at Yale and went to law school at Boston University. How did you eventually get into writing books?

I was in law school, but I hated it passionately and began looking into anything else. I found Emerson University had a masters in publishing program, so I did that when I finished. I became a junior agent.

I built a client list that included a lot of YA authors, and I kept thinking I could write a YA book. I'd actually written a novel while I was in law school, so I knew I was capable of finishing something. As an agent, I'd seen a boom in contemporary fantasy. A publisher was looking for someone to write a YA book about Countess Elizabeth Báthory. I was a bit of a fangirl, and I wanted to write that story, so I auditioned and I got that job.

"I'VE DEFINITELY HAD EXPERIENCES WITH MAGICK IN REAL LIFE, BUT IT'S MORE MELLOW AND PERSONAL."
Lana Harper

For the next book I did in the series, I chose the subject myself: Catherine

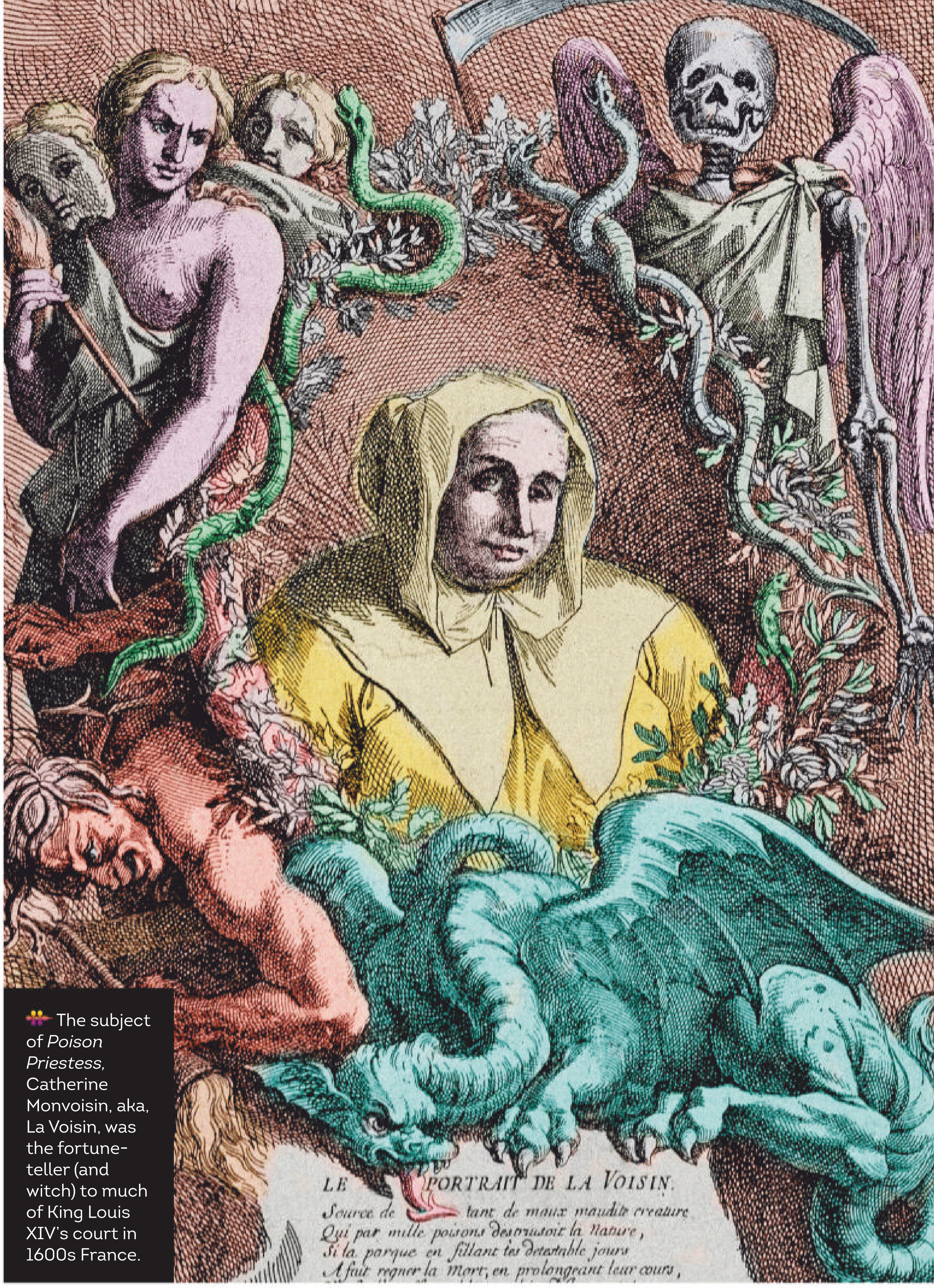
Monvoisin from the French court's Affair of the Poisons. She's such a fascinating character—she was at the center of a scandal in the king's court, but she was also performing abortions and she had a whole business as a psychic.

Why did you transition to adult fiction?
YA is on a really tight schedule and the books I was writing were really plot heavy. I'd always been writing on the older side anyway and I wanted to lean into that. At that time, my agent and I kept going back and forth over speculative rom-coms. I kept coming back to the idea of the film *John Tucker Must Die*, but where everyone is witches and two of them fall in love.

What makes the witch such a compelling character in literature?
That archetype of untamed feminine power is always appealing. There's never been a time, as women, when we aren't oppressed or put into boxes. And it's compelling to have a woman make her own story.

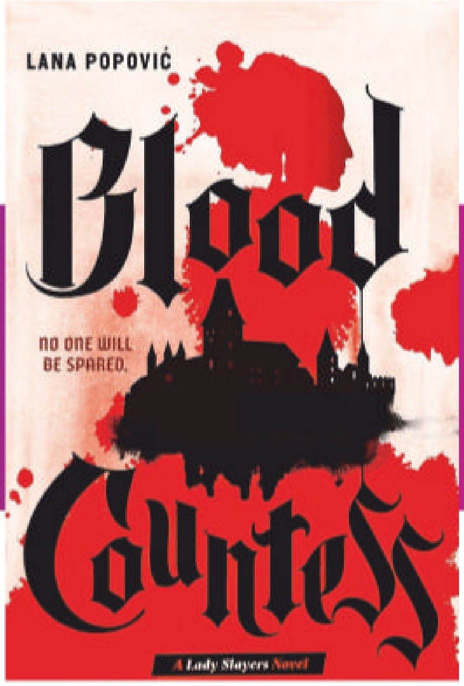
There's a lot of different traditions, but this idea of a woman who sets her own path and is in control of her own destiny—unimpeded by men—is appealing. Whether it's the maiden, the mother or the crone, you can be whatever witch you want.

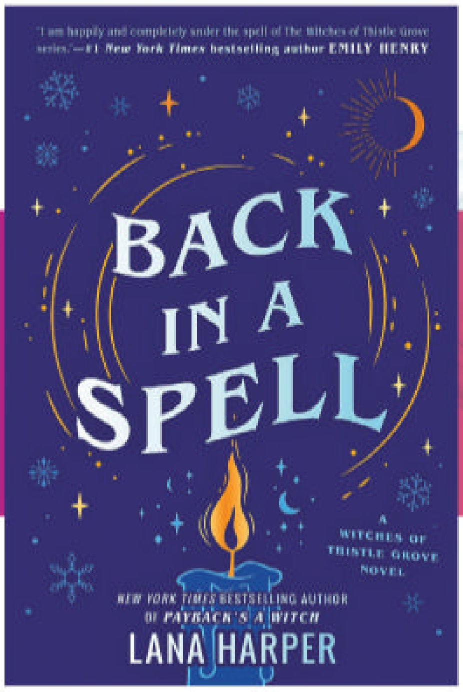
Do you identify as a witch?
I do. I was initiated into a Gardnerian coven years ago, but I took a sabbatical


LE PORTRAIT DE LA VOISIN.
Source de tant de maux maudite creature
Qui par mille poisons destruisoit la Nature,
Si la parque en fillant tes detestable jours
A fait regner la Mort, en prolongeant leur cours,

The subject of *Poison Priestess*, Catherine Monvoisin, aka, La Voisin, was the fortune-teller (and witch) to much of King Louis XIV's court in 1600s France.

LANA POPOVIĆ
FIERCE LIKE A FIRESTORM
A COMPANION TO WICKED LIKE A WILDFIRE


LANA POPOVIĆ
Blood Countess
NO ONE WILL BE SPARED.
A Lady Slayers Novel


"I am happily and completely under the spell of The Witches of Thistle Grove series."—#1 New York Times bestselling author EMILY HENRY
BACK IN A SPELL
A WITCHES OF THISTLE GROVE NOVEL
NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF PAYBACK'S A WITCH
LANA HARPER

from formal practice when the coven dissolved and I haven't joined another. I miss the circle and the kinds of ritualized traditions. I liked the feel of being a part of that.

Now, I consider myself more of a witch lite. I don't do formal ceremonies on my own, but I do a lot of Lilith-based meditation and work with the Dark Feminine. And I do a lot of shadow work.

Has your own magickal work influenced your writing?

Both yes and no. I have familiarity with rituals and practicing craft, but in the Thistle Grove novels, it's sort of like the Disney version of magick—it's so big and flashy and fun and explosive. That's not the kind of quieter magick of real-life witches.

I tried to use the different families in the series to show the different types of magick. There's one family that are necromancers from Slavic folklore—like Baba Yaga. There's also a family in the Druidic traditions who are healers. Another family draws on the pantheon of goddesses. And one family is elemental and they use illusions—that sort of fun, flashy stuff.

Who are some of your favorite pop culture witches?

I was such a *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* devotee. It holds up really well, and the romance between Willow and Tara as a sapphic couple was really unusual for the time.

And of course *The Craft*. There are no self-identifying witches who grew up in a certain time who wouldn't cite it as an influence. I loved the big magick even though when you think about it, they were sort of the opposite of good coven dynamics. Though modern coven politics can occasionally be really punitive…so it might not really be that far off.

While your characters may be casting spells and dealing with curses, they're incredibly relatable. How do you strike that balance?

I strive for an accessible voice, but not so much so that the magick is jarring. I do feel like it's a balance between this could be anyone and this person just happens to live in a world of magick.

One thing I do is cover real-world issues. In *From Bad to Cursed*, the protagonist is a badass necromancer, but she loves animals and volunteers at a shelter. And she's an anxious witch. I wanted to show that you can still be a badass necromancer even if you have anxiety-induced panic attacks. I try to juxtapose those real-life things with magick to show they can coexist.

What was your inspiration for the town of Thistle Grove?

Thistle Grove is based loosely on Salem, Massachusetts. I love the vibe of the town, and a lot of places in Thistle Grove have counterparts to real things in Salem. But I wanted to have it be the opposite of what happened there. I wanted to invent a new place without the grotesque history of misogyny and murder. I didn't want that to be a part of the conversation. I wrote *Payback's a Witch* during the pandemic and I wanted it to be a happy, safe space.

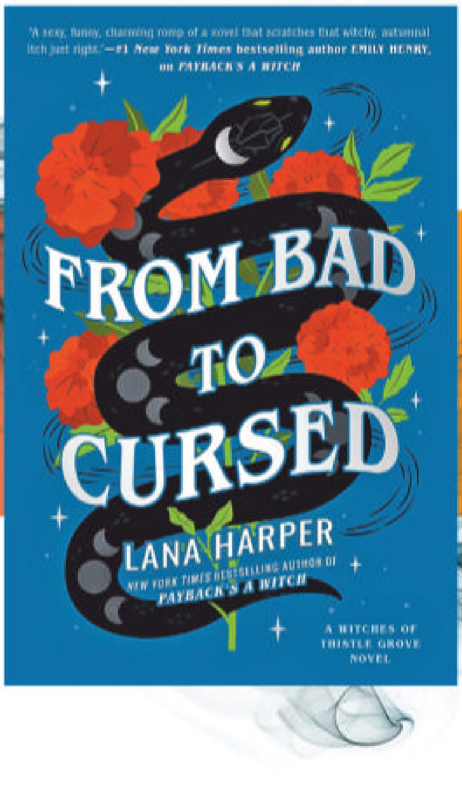
I also wanted it to be a place where a bisexual romance could be normalized and doesn't have to be a coming-out story. In the real world, so often we never get to have that.

What do you say to people who dismiss the rom-com supernatural genre?

I find it infuriating. Women enjoy it so it's somehow of lesser value because it has sex and sexy themes? Would it be considered "literature" if there were more "man problems"? This extends to a lot of what women and especially teenage girls enjoy. It's not fair and it's not helpful to put romantic comedy in a less valuable space. I love writing wicked and fierce characters, and they really hit home for some people.

What other projects can your fans look forward to?

I don't have any current plans to write another YA book. I really loved telling the stories of the four families in Thistle Grove. While I can't officially talk about it, I'm hopeful there will be a fourth book. Witches are my brand!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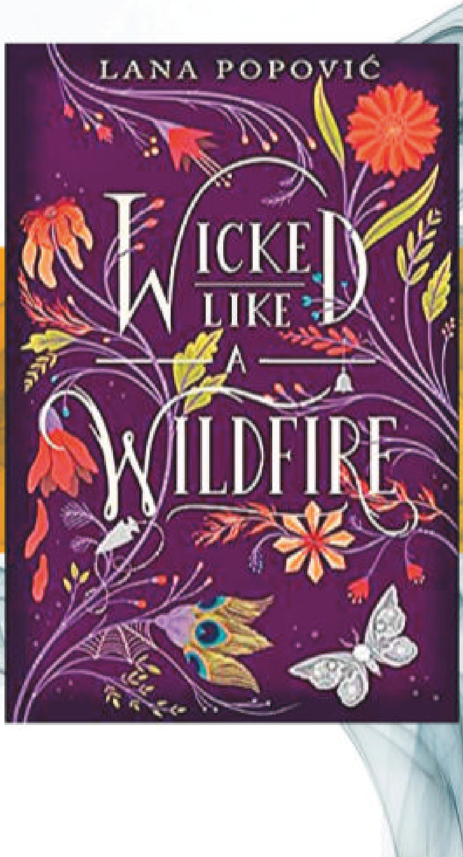
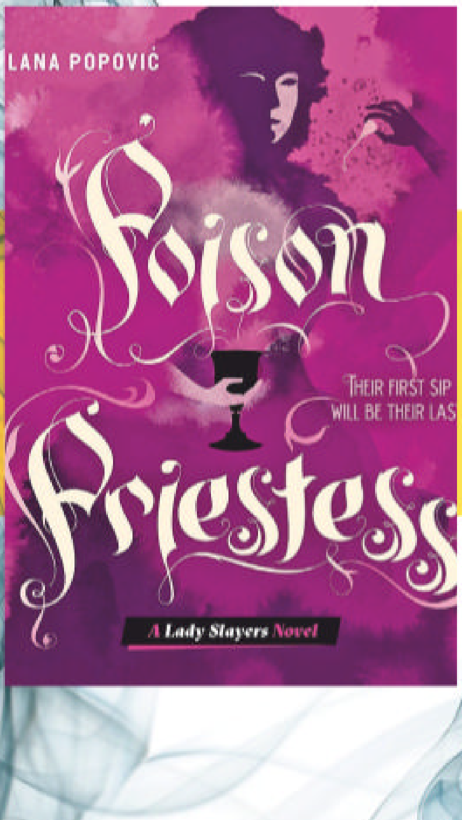
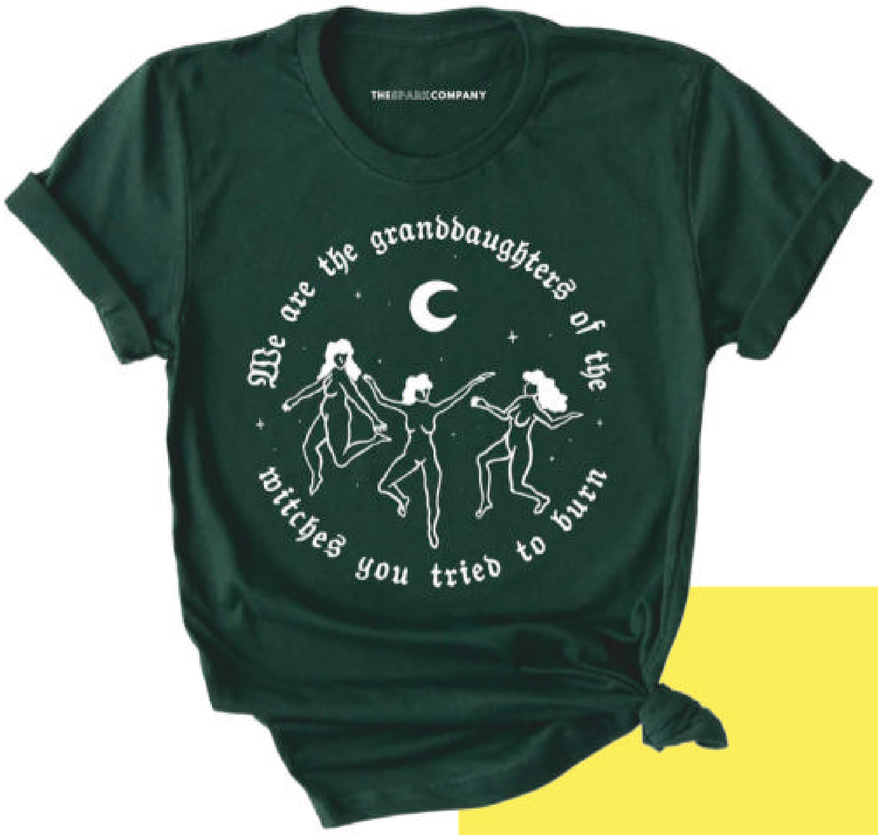




BROWSE OUR Mystic Market

From decor to divination tools, we've rounded up some of our favorite products for your practice.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Wear your feminism on your sleeve with this sassy shirt.
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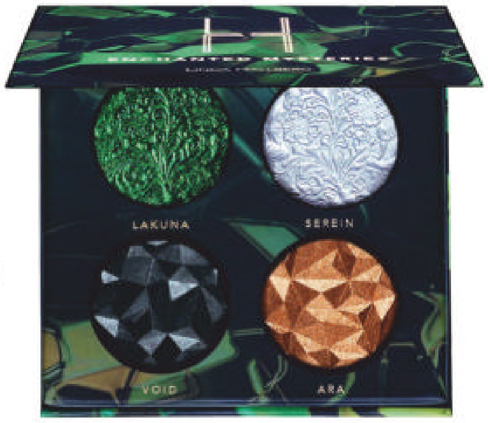
ENCHANTED MYSTERIES
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SEREIN
VOID
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Crafty Cosmetics
The Enchanted Mysteries Palette is pure glamour magick.
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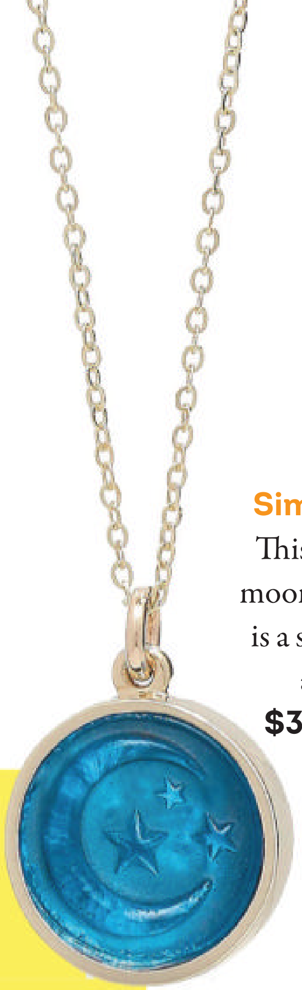
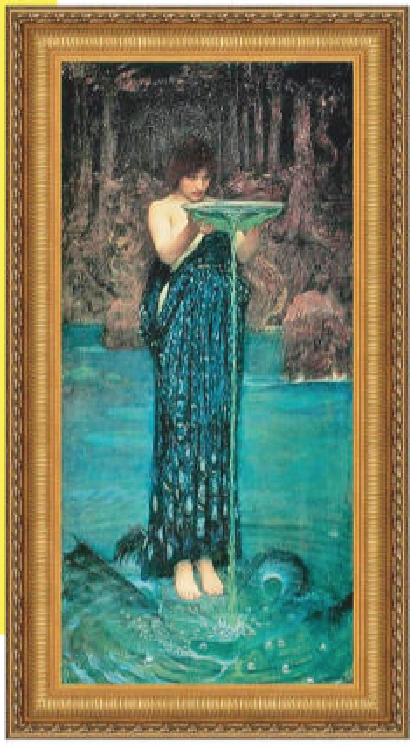


Simply Charming
This pretty pendant's moon and stars intaglio is a symbol of renewal and guidance.
$340 *talonnyc.com*



Canvas Stretch
Fans of John William Waterhouse's "Circe Invidiosa" can snatch up a replica version.
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Children 8 and up will love the recipes and rituals in *The Little Witch's Book of Spells.*
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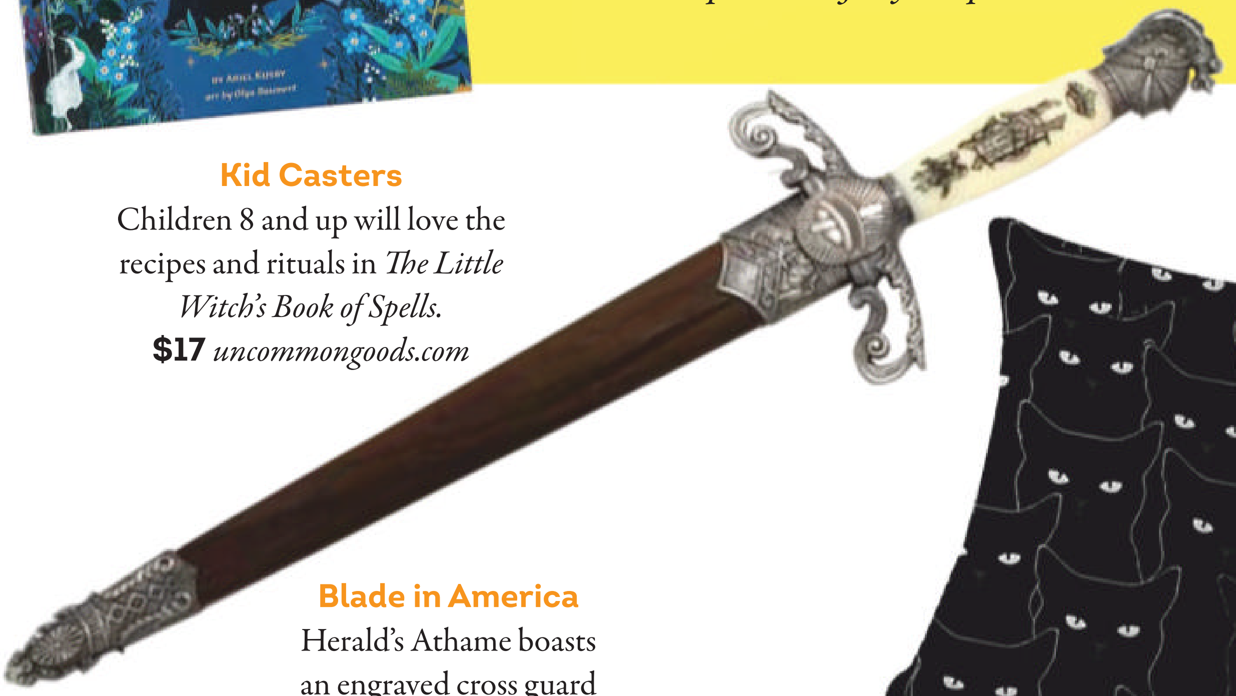

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NEW
TO THE
COVEN

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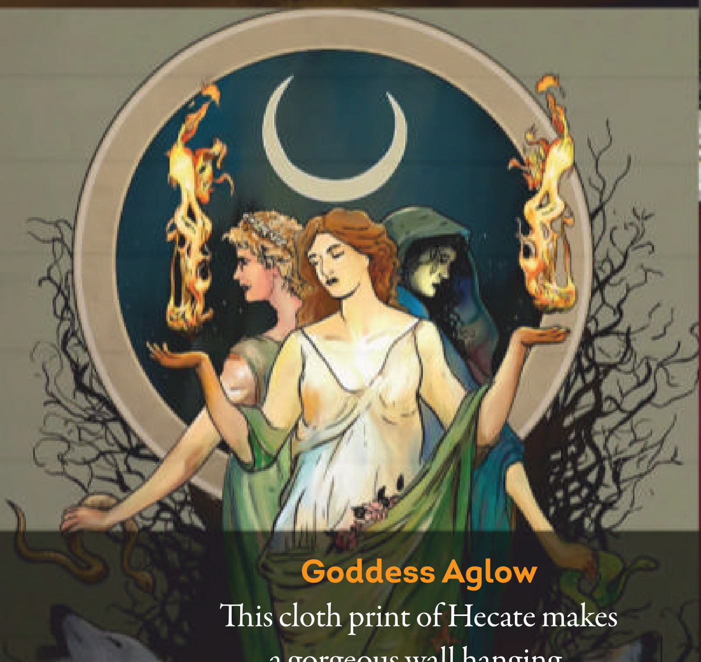

Goddess Aglow

This cloth print of Hecate makes a gorgeous wall hanging.
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For Every Occasion

The Altar Cloth Kit includes five different color options.
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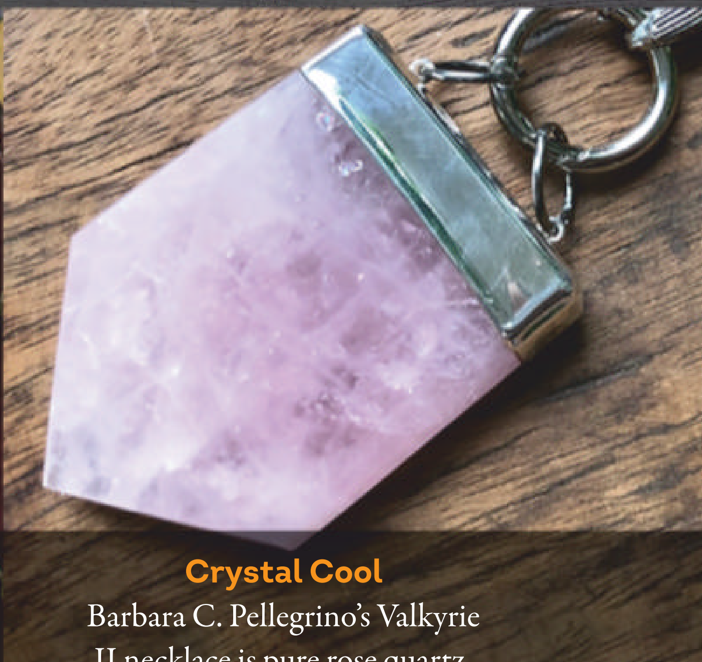

Crystal Cool

Barbara C. Pellegrino's Valkyrie II necklace is pure rose quartz.
$110 *bcpjewelry.com*

THE TRUTH BEHIND THE LEGENDS & LORE

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Runes may look like squiggles drawn on rocks, but they have a long and storied place in magickal practices.

THE HIGH PRIESTESS